

State and Local Highway Planning in Michigan

ROBERT F. VAN HOEF, Director, Planning Division, Office of Planning, Michigan State Highway Department, Lansing

● **THROUGHOUT** America, as the giant highway program moves into the city, it runs head-on into an equally impressive urban redevelopment program. The population explosion in the metropolitan centers of this country; the rearrangement of population characteristics and distribution within the urban area; blight, deterioration, and slums in the old core area of the city; the inability of deteriorated property in the central core of the city to compete for new land uses; all have prompted a tremendous city rebuilding effort across the entire country. Past Federal government financial support of this urban rebuilding program is scheduled to grow considerably in the future according to the promises of both political parties.

Without an appreciation of the urban rebuilding program, there can be no real understanding of the urban highway planning problem. The problems of urban renewal or city rebuilding and urban highway building become one in the most complicated and confused section of the American landscape. So the question comes to highway planners; for what kind of city are today's urban trafficways being built? Is it the city known in the past—the city that made the hard conversion from water to rail to motor transportation with little adjustment in the basic land-use pattern? Is it the city known today—a city plagued with overdevelopment, disorder, slums, and blight; a city of artificial boundaries; a city with a mobile population which struggles to escape the old in favor of the fresh, green, verdant periphery? Or finally, are urban trafficways being built to the fashion of the emerging new American city—the city now in redevelopment—characterized by the Baltimore Charles Center, the Philadelphia Penn Center, the Detroit Riverfront and Convention Center, the Pittsburgh Golden Triangle, the Cincinnati Riverfront Reconstruction, the rebuilt downtown of Murfreesboro, Tenn., the Kalamazoo pedestrian mall—a few of the many illustrations of the emerging new dimensions of the American city. It is to this problem that the Michigan State Highway Department, under a planning minded highway commissioner, has addressed itself. With new people with urban planning backgrounds, the department has proceeded to develop an expanded program of state-local urban highway planning.

The topic, "State-Local Highway Planning" assumes that representatives of state and local government each have, and will continue to have, a part of the responsibility for urban highway planning. Can this be assured, especially in the light of recent contentions that urban highway planning should be done exclusively at the local level, or on the other hand, that it has been and should continue to be a sole accomplishment of state highway planners?

Recently there has been some dissatisfaction expressed in certain quarters with the conduct of state-directed highway planning in urban areas. This has prompted suggested procedural changes which in some cases have taken the form of congressional legislative proposals. This dissatisfaction centers on a fear that the urban highway program, as conceived by highway planners, will not harmonize with the city as it is defined by the master plan. What has prompted this concern? The author does not believe that it is born out of a record of past failures in the urban highway building program, but stems primarily from the unsolved dilemmas which have become a part of the urban problem. We still live with the failure of any metropolitan governmental machinery to erase fractionated governments and to provide a base for dealing with urban problems. Positive land-use controls must be found to replace worn out zoning ordinances. The failure of central business district promotion to stem the tide of retail decentralization has been witnessed. A rebuilding program must be found which will check the tide of blight and deterioration in the central core of the city. Although urbanized,

America is still a country of rurally dominated state legislatures. No wonder there are some who question, in the same tone, whether the city will be properly represented in the decision-making process attending the planning and construction of urban trafficways.

The same frustrations which confront the local planner and give rise to his concern about highway planning also disqualify him for the task of solving alone the urban highway problem. A regional highway system cannot be framed on the illogic of governmental incorporation. Those who have had experience in the problem of urban expressway location in large metropolitan areas will appreciate the significance of this fact. There is an obvious fallaciousness in the transportation study which illustrates an expressway design and location in terms of assessed valuation of property taken, present tax income lost, future tax potential destroyed for a unit of government which has no reason to exist in the metropolitan complex other than the coincidence of political incorporation. To even attempt to plan a transportative system on such a basis does little more than arouse political resistances which can grow into major obstacles in the effectuation stage.

How would proponents of urban highway planning at the local level expect a regional highway system to grow out of the existing fractionated governmental structure of the metropolitan area?

On the other hand, the value of a system of urban trafficways can be measured by its ability to serve the community, both existing and future. Traffic is the product of the community, not its designer. Thus, the merits of the transportation plan are in direct proportion to the excellence of the community plan with its central business district redesign, its residential neighborhood and sub-communities, its industrial parks and rehabilitation and redevelopment project. These are the determinants of the transportation plan as they are defined in the community plan. No one would contend that the highway planner is in the proper position to define these community goals and objectives. First, the urban planner must have a community plan prepared in cooperation with the community interests, which must effectuate the plan and live in the resulting community. The interpretation of the community plan in terms of traffic and transportation facilities and its integration in a regional or statewide system is, and must remain, the role of the highway planner. The two steps cannot occur sequentially, but must happen simultaneously through coordinated efforts of local and state planners.

Accepting the premise that the urban highway planning program will continue to involve both state and local planners, the key to success is coordination. The Michigan State Highway Department has long enjoyed a friendly and cooperative planning relationship with local units of government. To enhance this relationship, the department has recently developed both a new urban planning program and a prescribed urban planning procedure, both of which are designed to produce coordinated state-local urban highway planning.

The department's urban planning program has its basis in a policy established for the State of Michigan by the highway commissioner to the effect that no construction of any significant proportion can occur in any Michigan municipality unless and until an urban highway plan shall have been prepared. Preparation of an urban highway plan thus becomes the crux of the urban planning program. Responsibility for the preparation of urban highway plans has been delegated to the planning division, one of three divisions of the department's office of planning. A route location division, and a programming division comprise the other two divisions of the office.

What is an urban highway plan or an urban trunkline plan as defined here? Basically, it is a documented presentation of long-range highway objectives for an area. The documentation of these long-range objectives illustrates two facts: (a) There is mutual agreement between the local community planners and the highway department planners on a system of highways, and (b) the proposed system is compatible to and consistent with existing and proposed development projects and capital improvement programs of the local community.

These conclusions are jointly reached by the highway department and the local community. The planning division represents the department in the conduct of necessary

traffic and planning studies and in the decision-making process. But who in the organization of local government should be its representative? On this subject there has been much difference of opinion. In Michigan, as is true in most other states, there is available planning enabling legislation on the basis of which local government can establish local planning commissions and delegate to these commissions the responsibility for the preparation of master plans. Master plans are statements of long-range community goals and objectives. In a community which has availed itself of this opportunity, there would seem to be no alternative but to work through the planning commission as the local representative on the urban trunkline team. But this is not the easiest of tasks, for the stature of planning commissions varies from community to community along with the generosity of legislative bodies in actually assigning planning responsibility.

However, there is much to be said for the coordinated effort between the planning division and local planning commissions. Both are recommending agencies; the local planning commission making recommendations to its local legislative body, and the planning division of the highway department making similar recommendations to the highway administrators. If there is any objection, it may come from the local legislative body or the manager who may object to their omission from the development phase of the highway plan. These objections are somewhat eased with the explanation that before any projects are constructed within the urban area the concurrence of the local legislative body is required. Therefore, the local legislative body is not omitted from the urban highway building program, although they are not made a participant in the preparation or adoption of the urban highway plan. Local concurrence with the plan is manifested by a resolution of the local planning commission to the effect that the proposed system of highways is consistent with the master plan for the community and the development and redevelopment objectives thereof. It is important to note that local concurrence does not make the trunkline plan a part of the master plan, although this is possible where exact coincidence occurs. In most cases there will be slight differences which, if made a part of the master plan, would require satisfaction of public hearing requirements.

To date, this described planning approach to the local community has been very successful. The only place where it has become difficult is where the local planning commission does not properly inform the legislative body of its activities. This situation should seldom arise, for the mayor, the manager, and one council or commission member are made a part of the local planning commission, and should take back to the legislative body a report of the activities, recommendations, and conclusions of the planning commission.

From the standpoint of documentation in the urban trunkline plan, in addition to the formal resolution of concurrence by the local planning body, sufficient illustrations of local community development and redevelopment plans are included to manifest that the proposed arrangement of state trunklines is an integral element of the community development pattern.

Once prepared, copies of the urban trunkline plan are made available to the local planning commission for use in recommending to the legislative body. In the highway department the plan is referred to the sister divisions of the office of planning. The route location division, when necessary, makes engineering feasibility studies of the proposed routes included in the urban trunkline plan, and the programming division programs for construction all, or parts of the plan, as warranted by statewide priorities.

The urban trunkline planning approach has been well received in the State of Michigan, not only in the local communities, but in the highway department. It has demonstrated to local communities the concern of the department in the proper integration of highway facilities and community development programs. The documented plan, distributed throughout the highway department, has called attention to the relationship of the proposed trunkline improvements to local development plans. Because the plan is documented and because it carries with it the approval of the local planning commission, the other agencies of the department are less prone to deviate from the planning proposals in the design or construction stages.

The second part of the urban planning program is the planning procedure guide, which has been developed by the Michigan State Highway Department. This is a natural complement to the urban planning program. This guide, entitled, "A Checklist for Highway Planning Reports", was itself the product of a coordinated state-local highway planning effort. The Michigan State Highway Department, the City of Detroit, and the Wayne County Road Commission have been joined together for the purposes of highway building under a tri-party agreement. This agreement delineates the financial, planning, and construction responsibilities of the three agencies as they regard the expressway program in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. To harmonize the efforts of these three agencies, to permit the division of work and responsibility, to define planning report requirements, to permit the establishment of a time schedule and a progress reporting system, management of the highway department requested that a guide be prepared which could function as a specification for planning studies to be done by others, but to be used by the department. Such a "checklist" was prepared in cooperation with the participating agencies.

The "Highway Planning Report Checklist" enumerated many of the considerations which should apply in the analysis of a highway proposal. The "checklist" stressed those city planning criteria and community measurements necessary to assure that a road facility would be an integral element in the over-all community design. On the basis of comparative analysis obtained by applying the itemized considerations to alternate alignment and design proposals, the "checklist" items were given meaning.

The "checklist" found ready application in the Detroit Expressway study program and, in addition, permitted the required coordination and controls requested by department management. The "checklist" also found application in the highway department as a guide in the preparation of highway plans and planning reports. The fact that it was a pioneering effort was evidenced by many requests for copies from other highway departments, governmental and private planning agencies.

A second printing soon became necessary, but before reprinting, it was decided to refine the report based on initial experience with its application. The revised "checklist" has now been completed. It is organized into three parts. Part I is the "outline", or the procedural guide for the preparation of a highway planning report. This is a general outline which is applicable to any of the great variety of planning problems which confront a highway department. Part II, which is the "checklist" proper, includes the details which expand on the skeletal framework of the "outline". In this second part are enumerated the details or considerations which should apply in the conduct of the procedural guide of Part I. These include relationship of highway proposals to other traffic systems and other modes of travel, traffic data, economic base data, land use, population growth and distribution, local plans and programs, geographical data, and many others. In addition, maps and exhibits are suggested in order to emphasize the details. These considerations are further amplified in Part III by a list of sources of information and references which explain them and their application.

The "outline", or Part I, is the framework of the "checklist". In it, four major steps form the procedure of a highway planning analysis. These are, as follows:

1. An inventory and description of the area involved by the proposed route to determine all present conditions.
2. A forecast of future conditions based on existing conditions and established trends.
3. An analysis of what must be done to provide possible alternate transportation networks that will satisfy forecasted future conditions.
4. A recommendation on the bases of the comparative analysis of alternatives of the best alignment and design for a highway facility.

The considerations suggested by the "checklist" are not new, but have long been a part of highway route analysis. The "checklist" does display them in their logical relationship to long-standing engineering tests. It also gives meaning to these considerations by making them measurements of a comparative analysis. There is little doubt

that the revisions made to the original effort are but the beginning of a continuing effort to further precise and refine the necessary procedures and considerations, which will insure that the highways being built today will function in the cities of tomorrow.

There are, no doubt, other equally effective methods of coordinating state-local highway planning. Perhaps one receiving most attention at the present is the coordination of planning assistance programs. Under the Federal Housing Act, urban planning assistance grants are made available to communities under 50,000 population. A prerequisite to state qualification for these Sec. 701 funds is the existence of a qualified state agency to administer the program. Thus an attractive opportunity is provided at the state level to coordinate 701 local planning programs with state-directed transportation studies. The privilege of state highway departments to make a similar distribution of one and one-half percent highway planning funds to local communities for transportation planning, adds more opportunity for coordinated planning. A combined program using 701 planning assistance and highway planning survey assistance can provide a planning program for local communities with built-in community and highway planning coordination.

Although Michigan initiated this year a 701 planning assistance program it is doubtful if it will make much of an impact on the urban highway planning program. These financial-assistance incentive plans would appear to be most effective in the initiation of planning programs. Most Michigan cities have long histories in local planning. Whether these aids are used, or not, they are for the most part short-term programs and there will remain after their completion the problem of coordinating a continuing state-local planning program which extends from data gathering and surveys through the decision-making process of planning effectuation. It is to this larger program that the Michigan state highway planning program is directed.

As the state highway department displays a greater sensitivity to the problems of the urban areas, it is participating more and more in local planning problems. Two examples are central business district redevelopment programs and urban renewal projects. The problem of improving circulation in the central business district, which is basic to central business district redevelopment or rehabilitation, is coincident with better state trunkline service for the central city. Most of the retail areas remain chopped up by state highways, usually with a highway or two on the main business street. The same congestion which is impeding highway movement is becoming objectionable to retail interests and pedestrian movement. Often local circulation can be improved by the same measures which provide better highway service to the community. Cooperative action is in the best interest of all. The department has also been able to assist cities with the preparation of urban renewal projects by fitting highway project programming to that of local redevelopment and rehabilitation efforts. The urban trunkline plan becomes a framework for the planning of urban renewal projects. Although no financial rewards return to the department as a result of their participation in urban renewal, revised land-use patterns, which can be designed in conjunction with highway design, are an asset to the highway system as well as the redeveloping community.

It has often been said, with great truth, that with 80 percent or more of our population residing in urban areas, the economic and social well being of these urban dwellers will determine the prosperity and living standard of the nation. Also, history tells us that most of the great civilizations of the past eventually focused in community or urban environments where they have deteriorated away to national collapse. Today, planners have yet to solve the land-use problem that is eating away at the vitality of urban places. The planners have not yet found the answer to the problem of urban sprawl on the periphery, or urban decay at the core. Perhaps a revised urban transportation system is the answer, either in whole or in part. If it is, it will only be recognized through the coordinated efforts of state and local planners.

Michigan has tried the coordinated planning approach and finds that it works. An effort has been made to define the procedures and techniques, which have been found to be satisfactory but are steadily being improved. And finally, in the recognition of the new responsibilities in urban areas, a new excitement has been found as highway planners become partners with local planners in the fascinating task of rebuilding Michigan cities.