

INTERSTATE 105: DESIGN TEAM CONCEPTS

Donald Graff, Gruen Associates, Los Angeles

ABRIDGMENT

•THE CALIFORNIA Division of Highways brought together a design team to identify, analyze, and make recommendations on opportunities to increase benefits and minimize disruptive effects on communities, neighborhoods, and specific facilities adjacent to the proposed Interstate 105, Century Freeway. This 17-mile, 10-lane freeway will traverse 9 cities and a portion of Los Angeles County.

The multidimensional approach, utilizing the design team, assisted in evaluating the freeway's total environmental impact regardless of responsibility or jurisdiction. Many effects still within the parochial restraints of traditional jurisdiction were identified and resolved by using existing procedures and programs.

Time and time again, however, the design team came to unbridged gaps separating the art of freeway planning, which is well advanced, from that of freeway-related implementation programs and legislative tools, which lag far behind. The introduction of the multidisciplinary consultants into the process, while advancing the art of freeway planning, has simultaneously tended to raise the level of expectations and, consequently, further widen the gap that already existed between what can be done and what should be done.

The basic problems and opportunities encountered throughout the study of the freeway corridor had great similarities from one community to another. The treatment of the problems and the implementation of the opportunities, however, required solutions tailored to each community's unique objectives and plans. In this respect, each community along the freeway route was considered individually, and the consultant's recommendations pertaining to each recognized the community's objectives and balanced these against other factors that transcended local concerns.

The experience of this design team brought into question the validity of some widely accepted beliefs about freeway development. Among these was the belief that community benefits and costs can be lumped together and balanced off. It was found that cost-benefit trade-offs are only effective if the benefits are at least equal to the costs and if the benefits go to the same person or group paying the costs. Experience also showed that regional costs-benefits cannot reasonably be traded off against local ones, nor community-wide ones against individual ones. By the same token, long-range costs and benefits are not always balanced by their short-range opposites. Those in the path of a freeway are not interested in long-range benefits purchased at their short-term expenses. Nor do neighborhoods that will suffer from freeway impacts find promises of community-wide benefits compelling.

To bring about active and constructive community involvement requires that a local jurisdiction be viewed as a composite of many interest groups rather than separately as a single entity. It was found that these various interest groups are not all affected to the same degree by the freeway and its impact. Generally, the more immediate and the more personal the impact is, the more intense and emotional the reaction is likely to be, and the less interest there will be in long-range community-wide benefits. Therefore, until the more personal immediate impact problems are resolved, it cannot be expected that individuals or groups will participate in solving problems beyond their immediate self-interests.

The design team concept, no matter how successful in fulfilling its objectives, cannot be considered a panacea for all of the problems attending freeway development. The scale consisting of problems and opportunities at one end and resources and tools at the other is unbalanced and leaning toward the former. This has many serious implications as to the course of future freeway-related environmental impact and design studies, particularly in regard to the positions and roles played by highway departments, local communities, and private consultants. For the efforts of a design concept team to be most effective, there must be better balance of implementation resources and legislative tools.