ACHIEVING POSITIVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEWAY PLANNING PROCESS

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Amid today’s freeway controversies the mandate for a more comprehensive transportation planning process has been given a new phrase, "community participation." This paper outlines a means for achieving more effective participation and hence greater acceptance of new transportation facilities. A major component of more effective community participation is the identification of the various levels of interest that constitute the community. This is necessary to better understand their problems and concerns that in turn must be related to the benefits and costs associated with the freeway facility. Individual costs must be resolved independently of group benefits. If the gap between costs and benefits is too great and cannot be properly closed, then an option for providing no new facility must be considered. However, before such an option becomes final, there should be a comprehensive analysis to evaluate the consequences of such an action. The introduction of community participation into the freeway planning process has advanced the art of highway planning by bringing attention to problems not previously considered. It has also simultaneously tended to raise the level of community expectations and to increase the gap that already exists between what can be done and what should be done. The closing of this gap remains to be accomplished through new legislation, new funding, and a broadened sense of responsibility by federal, state, and local jurisdictions.

*A FREEWAY brings definite transportation benefits and fulfills other vital functions in the increasingly complex urban structure. The effect of its introduction into the urban fabric does not end with the initial impact. A chain of actions and reactions is set into motion that has far-reaching geographic and temporal influences on individuals, neighborhoods, cities, and entire regions.

A continuing effort is being made to cope more comprehensively with these impacts. A part of this effort is the use of the multidisciplinary design team. The Federal Highway Administration has stated that the objective of the design team approach is "to make sure that adequate attention is given to the preservation and enhancement of the quality of the environment, and related social and economic factors."

However, the design team concept, no matter how successful in fulfilling this objective, cannot be considered a panacea for all of the problems attending freeway development. The introduction of multidisciplinary consultants into the process has advanced the art of freeway planning by bringing attention to problems not previously considered and by suggesting implementation programs and procedures heretofore not thought of. But it has simultaneously tended to raise the level of community expectations and to increase the gap that already existed between what can be done and what should be done.

In most American cities, proposed freeway facilities are increasingly being challenged and opposed. Anti-freeway arguments include negative environmental impact,

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human dislocation, local community disruption and cost, and, most importantly, the question of the need for such a facility or whether the need can be met by other transportation modes.

Amid freeway controversies and freeway deletions, the need for community participation in a comprehensive transportation planning process has become a mandate. If community participation is to become truly effective, ways must be sought to draw individuals and community groups into closer and more meaningful relationships with the governmental planning process beyond that of merely being a "listener" and "adversary" at location and design public hearings. Techniques must be developed to bring major issues of freeway planning before people and, in turn, to accurately convey people's judgment and concerns back to the transportation planners and decision-makers.

Despite recognition of the importance of community participation, few effective techniques and procedures have been developed for involving local communities in the planning process. In this report I would like to share with you some of the experiences in community participation gained in a number of team studies undertaken for the California Division of Highways and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Although I will be reporting primarily on an approach to community participation in the urban freeway planning process, I believe the same approach can be applied to any transportation and land use decision-making process.

Based on our experience, let me propose ten steps for achieving effective community participation.

**STEP 1: WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY TO JOINTLY ESTABLISH THAT THERE IS A CLEAR NEED FOR THE PROPOSED FREEWAY FACILITY**

The freeway planning process through the 1950s and 1960s saw relatively little community opposition to the system and its development program. Although there were discussions on specific route location, the overall freeway system concept was seldom seriously questioned. This can be attributed primarily to the fact that the system's total benefits clearly outweighed its total costs. However, as the system reaches the point where it is beginning to fill in the freeway network interstices, the relationship between community benefits and the price that the community must pay comes closer together, and more and more justification is needed for individual freeway segments (Fig. 1). Furthermore, as the cost-benefit relationship changes, a growing resistance to freeway programs within urban communities emerges. The growth of this resistance has been gradual and cumulative, with people learning from the experiences of others. Today, in cities that have been engaged in freeway planning and building for years, planners often find areas slated for proposed facilities ready and waiting, organized and armed to the teeth.

Before initiating route location and environmental impact studies for a freeway, transportation demand projections should be documented and tentatively accepted by a local community. Unless the community is convinced of the need for a freeway by the traffic demand projections, constructive community participation cannot be achieved.

We have found that the question of whether or not a new freeway is needed will not dissolve with the adoption of a specific route location. The question will appear over and over again during the design phase, hampering constructive community dialogue and involvement. Experience has shown that the failure to respond directly and comprehensively to this sensitive question at the outset is likely to polarize the community prematurely to a no-freeway position. The most effective approach is to explore, jointly with the community affected, the demand analysis on a particular corridor based on the anticipated regional and local land use developments, evaluate what the most appropriate transportation modes are to meet the demand, and assess the future consequences of having no freeway facility improvements. Only then will the community begin to focus its attention on environmental impact, freeway location and design, community adaptation planning, and equitable compensatory program packages.
STEP 2: GAIN A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY VALUES, ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OBJECTIVES

The fulfillment of a freeway program requires reconciling the potential regional benefits and the localized socioeconomic and environmental impacts that the facility may bring. Quantifiable and nonquantifiable freeway impacts on the local community will vary significantly depending on the condition, characteristics, and objectives of that community. Thus, there must be a thorough understanding of regional and local community values, issues, concerns, and objectives. This understanding will help in structuring the citizen element for the most meaningful participation. It will establish at an early point in the planning process critical issues that, if left for consideration in a later stage in the development process, could produce an insurmountable impasse.

Knowledge of these issues will permit the planning body to prepare and document its response to critical local issues and concerns. In addition, understanding local issues and concerns will enable the planners to better identify other factors external to the particular facility under consideration that influence community participation and reaction. All of these factors accentuate the need for a thorough assessment of regional and local issues and concerns.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY VARIOUS AREA-WIDE AND IMPACT-ORIENTED COMMUNITY INTEREST GROUPS AND ESTABLISH AN ONGOING COMMUNICATION CHANNEL WITH EACH INTEREST GROUP

We must recognize that there are two distinct forms of community participation: objective-oriented and impact-oriented.

The first consists of participation by general community interest groups in the discussion of area-wide transportation-land use objectives, issues, problems, and opportunities, concentrating on area-wide benefits and costs that the freeway facility may bring to the community. Unless there is area-wide community support, expressed or latent, for the facility, the freeway planning process will certainly encounter major roadblocks, particularly in the more impacted areas.

The second form of community involvement is impact-oriented. It comes after various alternative route locations are proposed and those individuals and groups affected by each alternative can be reasonably defined. In this respect the community groups in this category may not be identical to the first. The task is to identify these newly created interest groups and address more directly the impact problems and equitable compensatory program packages.

To bring about active and constructive community involvement, it is essential to view the local community as a composite of many interest groups rather than as a single entity. The various levels of interest that constitute the community must be identified in order to understand local objectives, problems, and possible opportunities. 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 area-wide benefits. Therefore, until the more personal immediate impact problems are resolved, it cannot be expected that an individual or group will participate in solving problems beyond their immediate self-interest.

The following is an identification of groups at each level or range of concern and the most important impacts and needs related to each (Fig. 2); however, until a precise alignment is determined during the design phase, individuals will be uncertain as to which of the first three groupings they belong to:

1. Owners and occupants of properties displaced by the freeway:
   - Problems of dislocating families and businesses.
   - Separation from established neighborhood social patterns.
   - Need for replacement housing, relocation technical assistance, and monetary payments.
   - Problems in disposing of property during the period from route adoption to acquisition.
Figure 1. Freeway development in the Los Angeles region.

Figure 2. Freeway-community interaction.

1. Owners and occupants of properties displaced by freeway (individuals, businesses, institutions and community facilities).
2. Owners and occupants of properties left adjacent to or partially taken by freeway (individuals, businesses, institutions and community facilities).
3. Neighborhood or area adjacent to freeway (neighborhood residents and city officials).
4. School district (neighborhood residents, city residents, school district officials and city officials).
5. City, County, special districts and special interest groups (conservationists, chambers of commerce, etc.).

Figure 3. Implementation program gap.
1. Possible property value depreciation during the same period.
- Properties not maintained despite assurance of compensation at fair-market value.

2. Owners and occupants of properties left adjacent to freeway:
- Environmental impact of noise, air, and dust pollution.
- Safety hazards.
- Difficulty or inability to readily dispose of freeway-adjacent properties at full value because of environmental impacts.
- Redefinition of neighborhood boundaries, establishing new neighborhood edges to freeway, imposing disadvantages of edge properties on new group.
- Impact on life-styles of increased mobility and environmental impacts.

3. Neighborhood or area adjacent to freeway:
- Severance of neighborhood from larger community and from schools and other community facilities.
- Change in vehicular and/or pedestrian circulation patterns, including possible new or increased traffic flow.
- Proliferation of new freeway-related uses, resulting in possible conflict with existing uses; conflict between uses of different densities.
- Overall effects on neighborhood cohesiveness and stability.

4. School district:
- Noise, dust, and air pollution impact on school facilities.
- Change in pupil load, resulting in possible disruption to facility plans and change in facility operating efficiency.
- Change in school attendance boundaries.
- Reduction of school district revenue.

5. City and county (also special district and special-interest group):
- Change in economic base, on short-term basis, resulting in decreased tax roll from property acquisition.
- Local traffic reorientation, including introduction of regional through traffic.
- Pressure for accelerated land use change with possible conflict on orderly growth plans and budget programs.
- Potential conflicts and confrontation between various community interest groups and elected officials.

Ongoing community dialogue is perhaps the key factor to successful community participation. Because the planning process itself is of a continuous nature, the participation element should also be. If participation occurs at only one or even several points in time within the planning process, those participating will have a distorted view of the whole process.

As can be seen from the above groupings, the present form of public hearings is inadequate to provide the necessary communication channels. We should evaluate various alternative communication concepts such as pre-hearings, mini-hearings, community group meetings and work sessions, mass media presentations, reports and graphic displays, films, and post-hearings and various community attitude survey methods such as through personal interview, telephone interview, and mailout questionnaires. All of these available techniques should be assessed for their appropriateness, tailored to a specific freeway program and corresponding communication and interaction needs of each interest group.

One further concern that affects participation in decision-making as well as the total scope of citizen involvement is that not all persons or groups are able to participate in an equal manner. Some, because of educational and economic advantages, are able to exert greater influence, and hence it is possible that a distorted view and a decision favoring certain interest groups may prevail. If the objective of meaningful participation is to be achieved, technical assistance must be provided to certain disadvantaged community groups to enable them to translate their concerns to concrete proposals and to assess the impact of potential public action on their interest.
STEP 4: UNDERTAKE COMPREHENSIVE SOCIOECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES AND DETERMINE ANTICIPATED IMPACT COSTS AND BENEFITS TO EACH INTEREST GROUP

There has been a clear reluctance to identify individual and community costs beyond those resulting directly from freeway right-of-way acquisition because there are no compensatory programs for them. Instead, there has been customarily a lumping of all costs and benefits to show a trade-off balance on an area-wide basis.

I think you will agree, however, that it is neither equitable nor persuasive when attempting to obtain the community acceptance of the freeway to try to balance local losses against regional benefits, individual losses against community benefits, or short-term losses against long-term benefits. Cost-benefit trade-offs are only effective (a) if the benefits are at least equal to the costs and (b) if the benefits go to the same person or group paying the costs. Those in the path of a freeway are not interested in long-range benefits purchased at their short-term expense. Nor do neighborhoods that will suffer from freeway impacts find promises of community-wide benefits compelling.

This new cost-benefit analysis for each community interest group will include both quantifiable and nonquantifiable aspects of the impact of a freeway on the natural and man-made environment. At present, most impact statements represent an aggregate summation of socioeconomic and environmental impacts of a freeway on the local community. However, they are seldom disaggregated so as to be understood clearly by each interest group. The impacts measured against local values and concerns must be viewed through the eyes of those to be affected by the transportation facility and must be communicated in that context.

STEP 5: MINIMIZE LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPACTS AND OPTIMIZE LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH JOINT FREEWAY-CORRIDOR COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DESIGN

Two basic approaches can be followed to minimize community costs and disruptions and to assist in realizing new development potentials created by a freeway. You can select an alignment and design configuration that will adapt the freeway to the community, or you can adapt the freeway-corridor community to the freeway.

In adapting the freeway to the community, we should select and design a route that imposes the least amount of community costs. Since it is the freeway that is intruding on the community, it is the freeway planners' responsibility to first explore and implement to the fullest extent possible the adaptation of the freeway to the community. Where costs or losses are unavoidable, those who are incurring the costs should be compensated in principle by those who are benefiting on an area-wide basis. However, where there are gaps left unresolved by this first approach or when community objectives and plans require, then the second approach of adapting the community to the freeway must be utilized.

The task of adapting the community to the freeway is not now vigorously pursued by state agencies because it is considered outside their jurisdictional domains. Efforts to become involved with the broad spectrum of environmental concerns associated with freeway development are often short-circuited by lack of implementation funding and program packages. These procedural problems create uncertainties and credibility gaps, frequently leading to unnecessary hardships that disturb the local citizenry as well as providing grounds for local community opposition.

STEP 6: DEVELOP AND PROVIDE EQUITABLE COMPENSATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PACKAGE ALTERNATIVES TO EACH INTEREST GROUP

The freeway planning process is currently devoid of any significant program and funding packages to assist the community in adapting to the freeway by (a) compensating those adversely affected and (b) facilitating local land use changes to permanently solve problems left unresolved by freeway development.

This is a root problem. We come, time and time again, to unbridged gaps separating the art of freeway planning, which is well advanced, from that of freeway-related
implementation program packages and legislative tools, which lag far behind. These
gaps continue to hamper effective community cost-benefit trade-offs and, consequently,
effective community participation. Some of these gaps can be closed through immediate
improvements in existing administrative procedures and programs. The closing of the
remainder must await new legislation, new funding, and a broadened sense of responsi­
"bility on the part of federal, state, and local jurisdictions (Fig. 3).

In order to come to grips in a realistic manner with the shortcomings in the current
efforts to deal with freeway impact and community costs, a full understanding of the
broad spectrum of freeway-related impact is necessary. For example, impact costs
to each affected interest group can be compared with matching existing federal, state
and local programs to determine the extent of existing deficiencies. I believe that, until
the full range of impact costs and their interrelationships are set down in a systematic
manner, new procedural and legislative actions will continue to be piecemeal and ineffec­tive.
This, in turn, will cause concern and hesitation on the part of the local citi­
zenry, who will question the sincerity of the entire process. Effective community par­
ticipation does not end with the introduction of the public into the planning and decision­
making process. A further step is required that narrows the gap between identifying
issues and concerns and resolving them. The public must be convinced that such pro­
grams are available.

STEP 7: REACH A CONSENSUS WITHIN EACH INTEREST GROUP
AND AMONG INTEREST GROUPS ON A COURSE OF ACTION

The most desirable end is to obtain a substantial agreement on a positive course of
action (leading to the development of the proposed facility) from all participating inter­
ests, including those representing the impact-oriented groups as well as those repre­
senting area-wide interests. Since this type of agreement is becoming less and less
frequent, a second alternative is to obtain agreement on a positive course of action
from the majority of area-wide interests and some of the impact-oriented groups. This
may involve overriding the desires of other immediate impact groups but should only
be done when the impacts to these interest groups can be substantially ameliorated or
equitable compensation packages are made available to them. In essence, this alter­
native is plausible only if all the previous six steps have been properly and compre­
hensively taken.

A third alternative may involve a similar situation as the second alternative, except
that some of the previous steps (such as step 6—equitable compensation and implemen­
tation program packages) have not been fully taken. In this case, even if the majority
of the area-wide interest groups support a positive course of action, the proposed fre­
eway planning process should either be delayed until such time as all of the previous
steps are adequately taken care of or be abandoned.

A fourth alternative represents a nearly unanimous agreement on no freeway facility
either because of the failure to reach a consensus or because of the failure to meet the
requirements of some or all of the previous six steps.

In all of these situations, the most critical factor is what level of performance
standards our society or the local community considers adequate and acceptable based
on its value. If that performance level happens to be higher than our society at this
time can realistically deliver, then the only alternative available is a no-freeway
facility option. However, if that level happens to be within the range of delivery by our
society, then we could be more optimistic about the future of the entire community par­
ticipation process.

Before the no-freeway option is taken, however, there should be a comprehensive
analysis to evaluate the consequences of such an action. Since the transportation de­
mand would still remain in a particular corridor, a political commitment to provide
alternative modes to satisfy the demand must be made. If such alternatives are not
available to the community, then more stringent land use controls (which generally re­
quire greater political courage and commitment than those required for a no-freeway
option) should be imposed to bring the anticipated transportation demand and supply into
a dynamic equilibrium. Thus, the freeway deletion possibility should be considered in
a total package of action programs and should not be permitted to occur purely on emotional and political grounds.

STEP 8: ESTABLISH A CLEAR AND BINDING DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The mandate for a more comprehensive planning process for effective community participation must be balanced with an equally important mandate for a clear and binding decision-making process. Along with this there should be some definitive time limits for the freeway planning and decision-making process that provide a reasonable time frame for easy local comprehension. As long as previous decisions reached through the comprehensive planning process can be rescinded at any time with little or no just cause, the foundation of the entire community participation process will be significantly undermined.

One of the major difficulties with citizen participation in transportation planning is that of the long time span involved. This places additional stresses on participation in two ways. First, the makeup of the local community (elected and electorate) continually changes over time, and, consequently, they must be continually reinforced as to the processes and as to previous decisions. A corollary problem is that the highway agency’s personnel also changes; hence, the community faces a parade of new people. The second problem associated with the long time span is that of gaining active public interest in the early stages of the process and then maintaining it throughout the process. All too soon an atmosphere of public apathy exists up to the point just prior to the public hearings.

STEP 9: ESTABLISH A CLEAR APPEAL PROCEDURE AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A definitive appeal procedure must be established to provide ample opportunities within a prescribed limit for dissenting local jurisdictions and community interest groups to appeal their case. A state highway commission in which this appeal procedure now often rests tends to be generally identified with a highway department and thus may not be viewed by the local community as an impartial and objective body.

Hence, an independent arbitration body may be required to hear those cases in which the local community has a substantial reason for requesting a new hearing on previously made decisions. This request for a new hearing should only be permitted where significant changes in the socioeconomic and environmental characteristics of the community and, consequently, in the transportation demand have occurred, thus invalidating the basis for previous decisions.

STEP 10: ESTABLISH A BROADENED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT THOROUGHLY ENCOURAGES OPEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In cooperation with local, regional, state, and federal agencies, we must examine and evaluate ways and means to strengthen existing ongoing institutional instruments to encourage an open community participation process. Many of the existing institutional impediments and constraints must be lifted. The process must also be adequately funded and staffed by multidisciplinary professionals.

Since the transportation planning process is of a complex nature, it is necessary that the local community be fully informed as to all available programs, the steps in the procedures, and the ramifications of both their actions and those actions of the planners and decision-makers. The highway planning agency must be prepared to invest in this communication process if it expects to have effective citizen participation.

In the development of the institutional framework, the following factors, among others, should be considered:

1. The creation of a regional planning and transportation agency and a multimodal evaluation process are necessary to fully understand the interrelationships of any
changes in the freeway network and other modes of transportation. Clarification of the interactive relationships, including the anticipated share of the total transportation demand each mode can expect to serve, will support the necessity of a multimodal system. It will also aid in dispelling motions that any single mode, such as a rapid transit facility, can alone adequately serve all of the future transportation needs.

2. There should be a rapid computer response capability to make the transportation need analysis and assess the consequences of various transportation system modifications and deletions. If a portion of a freeway is to be deleted from the network or its scheduling is to be substantially altered, then the subsequent impact to local land use and transportation patterns should be made available and fully understood by the local community.

3. The transportation and land use planners should work with political and community decision-makers in finding some effective means to achieve a balanced development of land use and transportation facilities and consequently bring demand and supply into a dynamic equilibrium in a sequential time frame. While this concept has been widely endorsed, little has been accomplished to implement it.

In summary, there can be no half-hearted or partially committed community participation in the freeway planning process. The entire process must be completely open and participatory, and we must be prepared to accept all consequences of community involvement, including a popular decision that there be no freeway.

The documentation of freeway need, a thorough understanding of regional and local issues and concerns, ongoing community dialogue, environmental impact studies, sensitive planning and design, equitable compensation and implementation program packages, an open decision-making process, and a broadened institutional framework are all essential ingredients to successful community participation in the freeway planning process.