

NEW YORK STATEWIDE PLANNING PROGRAM: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

Robert Breuer, Planning Division, New York State Department of Transportation

•IN LATE 1968, we released our first report, Policies and Plans for Transportation in New York State. We are now in the midst of a major update of our statewide transportation plan. It is now in draft form, and I hope it will be released early this year. I think one of the best ways of demonstrating what our experiences have been and what we have learned in the past 3 years is to compare this new report with the first plan report.

For one thing, documentation of the new plan will be longer; including its technical supplement, the new report will have, I expect, 4 to 5 times as many pages as the first report. (After 3 years of effort, one should hope so!) I mention this not just facetiously. The report will be longer because, where the first plan gave general guidelines, the new plan will make specific recommendations for state policies and actions. It differs in another way too: The new report focuses attention on new problems and on different aspects of old problems; these were only hinted at or not even raised in the first statewide plan. The new plan is concerned with the operation of the transportation system as much as with the extent and the location of facilities. It is concerned with the variety of ways government, and state government in particular, affects the provision and the operation of the system, not with just those elements for which the state has specific construction or operational responsibility. To make this clear, I want to review briefly some major elements of the second statewide plan—intercity passenger transportation by air, rail, and bus; rural highways; freight; and urban transportation—and highlight the differences between it and the first plan.

In the first statewide plan, we proposed a fourth airport for the New York metropolitan area and an airport in western New York State. Although we repeat those recommendations, after 3 years of fruitless effort toward providing new airports, our attention has turned increasingly toward improvements in the operation of present facilities. We must consider rationing the scarce capacity at existing airports, both as a short- and a long-term solution. The option of absorbing the increase in aviation demand through larger planes, and not through more frequent flights, must receive careful consideration. Such rationing would prevent the severe access, relocation, and environmental problems that would be caused by constructing new airports. This strategy would also reduce the serious noise problem at metropolitan airports, by encouraging the phasing in of the newer jets having quieter engines.

In the second statewide plan, we are more concerned with the level of air service to smaller cities, a subject that did not receive much attention in the first statewide plan. I expect that airlines will continue to acquire larger planes because of cost-cutting pressures as in the past and because of expected metropolitan congestion in the future. Regional airline service is diminishing or disappearing at many smaller cities because of inadequate demand or inadequate facilities for the larger planes. As alternatives to costly runway extensions or new regional airports, we are turning our attention to the commuter air carriers—the third-level airlines, which operate smaller planes. As a result, there are recommendations in the second statewide plan for changes in restrictive federal regulations on plane size and for operating subsidies as alternative investments of public resources.

We conducted a study of the applicability of high-speed rail service in upstate New York, following the recommendations of the first statewide plan. The study has led to detailed feasibility studies of a new service from New York City to Buffalo. However, the second statewide plan addresses the more pressing question of the required level

of conventional rail service and will contain recommendations for additional trains and routes to be added to the National Rail Passenger Corporation's basic system. Federal legislation permits such extension where a state will subsidize losses.

For rural highways, our first master plan had no firm recommendation, other than a short-range program for freeway routes. It presented an extensive network of expressways that nearly covered the map of New York State; but this was not a plan, just long-range speculation. In the second master plan we will present the results of a freeway corridor study that recommends a much reduced freeway plan for 1990; when the Interstate and other committed freeways are built, the major intercity corridors will be largely taken care of.

Significantly, therefore, in the second statewide plan our attention is turned to the important question of the adequacy of the 75,000 miles of other rural highways. These provide access to rural residents, businesses, recreational areas, and farms; and their service in terms of speed, safety, gradient, and operating conditions varies considerably. It is not our intent to recommend a "plan" for these smaller scale facilities but, more significantly, to recommend standards and programs. Our work in the National Transportation Needs Study has shown that improvement of rural roads to the "ideal" standards set by the Federal Highway Administration would cost more than was anticipated by the highway-program resources or perhaps is even desirable. We are, therefore, examining alternatives to these standards and will be devising more reasonable standards that are commensurate both with the resources expected to be available and, perhaps more difficult, with the benefits provided.

For freight transportation, the first statewide plan had very general policies. Although we have studied freight transportation in more detail for the second statewide plan, our recommendations for freight transportation are not portrayed by additional maps of needed facilities—such as rail lines or truck terminals. Facilities are not so significant as service, as measured by speed, frequency, appropriate schedules, reliability, safety, and especially economy. These are operational questions and are so complex that they are beyond the present ability of government and should perhaps be left ultimately to the private companies that conduct the operations. Our concern is more with the governmental policies and actions that affect the relative treatment of these companies, the potential for profit or even existence of private modes, and thereby the quality of service.

If government can foster an economically viable private transportation industry and treat competitors equitably, there will be a rational allocation of freight by mode; and such problems as boxcar shortages or track maintenance will take care of themselves. In this regard, we concur in general with the National Transportation Policy, released in 1971 by the Secretary of Transportation, which would place greater reliance on the forces of the competitive market in setting the cost and the level of transportation service.

For railroads, for example, this means consideration by the state of local tax changes. It means the elimination of many uneconomical branch lines; but where it is determined that there is a developmental or other social need for service, even though it is uneconomical, the service should be supported by public funds rather than by the company or users of the service.

For trucks it means the state is reducing or eliminating restrictions on entry and exit for regulated motor carriers, giving more freedom to the carriers to set individual rates, and eliminating other administrative and legislative restrictions on service.

For waterways (and in New York State we are unique in owning a 500-mile canal), it means, in addition to questions of system extent and facilities, the question of charges to canal users.

For ports it means concentrating on the financial and facility needs of public ports. Private ports handle more than 90 percent of New York State's port tonnage, but their facilities are privately supplied and require little state attention, a distinction not emphasized in the first statewide plan. There are 6 ports owned and operated by local government or public authorities, 5 in the upstate area and the Port of New York. Their future financial viability and the state's role will be a major concern of the second statewide plan.

New York's statewide plan is not only devoted to intercity systems but also includes urban transportation. Statewide planning involves not developing urban plans (the responsibility of the several urban transportation studies in the state) but reporting on them and assessing them from a statewide view. The second statewide plan will, therefore, contain, as did the first, a major urban-transportation element. It is much more detailed now, reflecting the completion of many urban transportation studies; these have produced major facility recommendations and have entered their continuing phase.

When the results of urban transportation planning are viewed statewide, however, new questions are raised. Have the values assumed for plan development, and especially their relative weights, altered by the passage of time? The question applies not only to construction costs, which have inflated significantly faster than user savings in the past decade, but also, and more important, to the environmental and social costs attendant on new construction. From the public response evidenced in the last decade, the latter received far from sufficient weight in plan decisions.

Another question to ponder is, Have operating problems and solutions received sufficient attention in urban transportation plans? Improvements to the operation of existing facilities were not the thrust of those studies. Improvements to traffic flow on existing streets, peripheral parking, priority transit lanes on expressways and streets—these are alternatives only beginning to be fully explored and applied.

For transit, similarly, our attention was on facilities, such as new express bus or rail transit lines. Questions of operating subsidies to permit improving or maintaining the quality or extent of local transit service, or to eliminate fares altogether, have rarely been considered, although, in terms of need and benefit, they are valid alternatives for the investment of public resources.

I think it is now apparent that New York's second statewide plan will be far more than a map of new capital facilities. It must concern itself with major and difficult questions of resource allocation between highways and public transportation, between urban and rural programs, and between capital and operating assistance; and it must address questions of the appropriate state involvement in freight transportation. The second report, therefore, while containing more detailed and specific recommendations than the first, raises many new questions as well—questions that, because they concern value judgments and new public responsibilities, involve citizens and their leaders as well as professional transportation analysts and planners.

Therefore, the second report will be different from the first in another, equally significant, way. Rather than issue a single, final report, we plan to release a draft report early in 1972. We want to provide for widespread public review and examination of the results of planning studies and to describe, as frankly as we can, their basis and assumptions. There will be public hearings in many areas of the state, therefore, at which special-interest groups, local government officials, political leaders, and the public at large can make known their views of our recommendations. Only after these hearings and the modifications made as a result of them will the final version of the second statewide plan be completed.