

EVOLVING FEDERAL ROLE IN TRANSIT PLANNING

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●THE CONFERENCE SESSION on federal, state, and local roles in transit planning signified a major recognition of the coming of age of public transportation planning in this country. The past 4 years have seen major changes, at all levels of government and among private interests, in perceptions of our metropolitan areas, their development goals and objectives, and the place of transportation in shaping those urban centers.

Coincidentally, it has been in these same 4 years that the federal government has acknowledged its responsibility to metropolitan areas to help in the development and improvement of public transportation systems. In 1969, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration was able to provide less than \$175 million to areas across the nation for transit planning work, capital improvements, and essential research, development, and demonstrations. Now UMTA is in the midst of transit's first billion dollar year, with over \$920 million available in support of transit planning and capital projects and the remainder for an imaginative research, development, and demonstration program.

Clearly, major developments in federal support for public transportation have occurred in the past few years. Now is an opportune time both to reflect on what these changes have been and to consider where and how we proceed from here. Planning, by projecting the future based on past lessons learned, offers us an excellent means of self-analysis.

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR TRANSIT PLANNING

Federal support for transit planning has increased dramatically in the past few years. Whereas FHWA 1½ percent funds and HUD 701 planning assistance grants provided limited support for transit planning through the late 1960s, substantial federal support for public transportation planning did not materialize until meaningful funding of UMTA's technical study program took place. In fiscal year 1969 technical study funds were limited to \$5 million, with an additional \$2.5 million in local matching funds required. In succeeding years UMTA has provided 9, 15, 25, and now, in fiscal year 1973, \$33.5 million in support of public transportation planning in the nation's metropolitan areas.

Of far greater significance than this increase in planning aid has been the dramatic growth of the capital grant program. In fiscal year 1969, grants of less than \$150 million were made, whereas \$510 million in federal grants were made during the past fiscal year. UMTA's capital grant program for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1973, is in excess of \$860 million.

UMTA CAPITAL GRANT GUIDELINES

With this major program increase have come very reasonable questions about how UMTA allocates capital grants among competing applicants. Following months of extensive evaluation and negotiation with industry and governmental interest groups, UMTA, in July 1972, issued new guidelines for capital grant selection. These guidelines are intended to spell out essentially the criteria by which capital grant requests are evaluated, recognizing differences in size and complexity among urban areas. Three size categories are set forth: under 250,000 population, between 250,000 and 1,000,000, and more than 1,000,000; and guidelines of increasing complexity are spelled out for each group. In areas of under 250,000, public transportation may be the only assurance of some degree of mobility for special groups (nondrivers, the young, the old, the handi-

capped, the poor). The provision of maintenance of service is, therefore, the more relevant objective for small cities. Often if local government support of public transportation is not forthcoming, complete cessation of service occurs with resultant aggravated immobility for captive riders.

In larger urban areas (i.e., those with over 250,000 population and particularly those with a million or more population), public transportation is perceived as a positive force for enhancing the quality of urban life. Transit investments are consciously directed at all three broad problem areas to which the capital grant program objectives relate: mobility for nondrivers, congestion and land use patterns, and environmental conditions. The guidelines should be viewed in the context of UMTA's fundamental interest in strengthening the local planning decision-making process.

UMTA is making a distinct effort to relate comprehensive regional planning, including transit planning, to those capital projects for which assistance is requested. UMTA is vitally concerned that the planning process serve as a means of evaluating alternative development patterns, geared to each urban area's unique goals and objectives, and the transportation-transit systems that can best satisfy those goals. Interest extends beyond a preoccupation with capital improvements to a concern with non-capital-intensive means of improving traffic (and therefore people) movements and associated transportation policy issues such as parking policies.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The capital grant guidelines therefore anticipate major policy and system recommendations, with supporting technical documentation, to emerge from the planning process. But what is the condition of the planning process today?

I do not presume to offer a definitive statement on this critically complex subject, but I can offer some observations that are shared, for the most part I believe, by local decision-makers and operators of public transportation systems.

1. The planning process is not comprehensive. Inadequate, or insensitive, attention is devoted to interrelating comprehensive land use and environmental planning with transportation planning.
2. Transportation planning has been for the most part highway planning. The opportunities that transit can offer in terms of moving people throughout an urban area, which is what I trust we all are seeking, have been inadequately considered. Certainly we must recognize the late arrival of meaningful federal planning and capital assistance here. It is unrealistic to imagine that urban areas, whose only sources of transportation planning aid in the mid-1960s were HPR funds administered by state highway departments and meager 701 aid to embryonic regional planning agencies, will opt for transit-oriented solutions to their transportation problems when little federal aid was available to implement those plans.
3. Elected officials at the metropolitan level have had little influence on transportation plans for their areas.
4. The whole process takes too long, costs too much money, and too often produces plans that cannot be implemented.

The real test of the observations, which unfortunately come across harder than they are really intended to, is whether the planning process is producing cities of vitality and promise and transportation systems that really work. For the most part, I would suggest that transportation systems can, and must, do a better job, especially in responding to the mobility needs of our citizenry who cannot afford cars and all their attendant costs and in shaping comprehensively planned urban development.

Lest I be chastized for these observations, note that the 1971 Pocono Conference, whose subject was Organization for Continuing Urban Transportation Planning, came to many of these same conclusions. Sponsored by the Highway Research Board and the Department of Transportation, the conference examined in considerable detail the transportation planning process. Some of the conference conclusions, summarized with some literary license, were that comprehensive and transportation planning must be better integrated, that most planning agencies lack the teeth to effect consistent plan

implementation, especially in terms of land use controls, and that a strengthening of organizations doing planning is essential.

MILESTONES IN UMTA INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING

Having offered some perceptions, I would like to offer some background on UMTA's evolving participation in the planning process as a prelude to a definition of our policies in the administration of the technical study program. With the passage of the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1970, which authorized \$3.1 billion over a 5-year period for public transportation improvements, we realized that we could no longer proceed with "business as usual." We committed ourselves to an aggressive program of support for transit planning that was integrated with regional comprehensive planning.

Working with FHWA, FAA, and the Office of the Secretary we sought to highlight the key issues, policy and procedural, affecting the planning process. Two results of this coordinated departmental effort were the creation of Intermodal Planning Groups (IPGs) involving UMTA, FHWA, and FAA participation in each standard federal region and the establishment by Secretary Volpe of four departmental goals for better intermodal planning. The two primary goals were

1. Agreement on a single grant recipient agency for DOT planning funds in each metropolitan area, and
2. Development of unified work programs as a basis for departmental funding.

Working with the IPGs around the country, we in UMTA began to meet with state, regional, and local agencies to discuss their planning programs. Just as the IPG effort was really developing, the Pocono Conference took place. Not only did we attend that gathering; we reacted through specific actions to its consensus recommendations to better integrate comprehensive and transportation planning and tie together planning and implementation.

PROGRAM POLICIES

Essentially, we fully supported Secretary Volpe's goals for improved planning by insisting on making technical study grants to a single agency in each metropolitan area, the agency responsible for comprehensive and transportation planning in all possible cases, but only after the agency in cooperation with other participating public groups had prepared a unified work program. The result of this approach has been dramatic, especially in terms of the progress made throughout the country in developing unified work programs. In fact a DOT order formalizing unified work programs as a departmental policy will be issued shortly.

To structure UMTA's technical study program policies in a comprehensive framework, I would like to use the three C's of the transportation planning process as a means and relate how we are trying to use the program to strengthen this process.

Comprehensive—Transit planning cannot be undertaken as a separate activity. It must be fully integrated into a region's comprehensive and transportation planning work program. Thus, we are now funding not only those work activities that are obviously transit-related but also other planning work that is critical to comprehensive planning. We are supporting land use, population, employment, growth policy development, citizen participation, and other planning work essential to transportation decision-making in numerous urban areas.

Continuing—Transit planning is a continuing process. It is our intention to support transit planning (as well as other elements of comprehensive planning and transportation planning) on a continuing basis. The growth of the technical studies program suggests a real federal commitment to the concept of continuing transit planning. But we are trying to avoid the problem of "endless planning" without products. We are insisting on timetables for study completion, and, with the recent addition of UMTA representatives in field offices throughout the country, we shall closely follow work in an effort to ensure timely completion. We are committed to supporting, on a continuing basis, those agencies that produce.

Cooperative—Memoranda of agreement were entered into around the country pursuant to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, spelling out the cooperative arrangements guiding the transportation planning process. FHWA's certification process has spurred a rethinking of the cooperative arrangements in existence for the planning process; so too has UMTA's technical study program.

In line with the Secretary's planning goals UMTA has endeavored to support a single planning agency in each urban area as recipient of technical study grants. We have utilized the concept of an area-wide grant to the planning agency as a means of securing regional cooperation. By area-wide grant we mean a grant to an agency such as the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission for work spelled out in the region's unified work program. Support is provided not only for the continuing tri-state planning program but also for a whole range of subregional project planning efforts to be carried out by numerous public agencies throughout the region as documented in the region's unified work program.

This approach allows us to make one major grant annually to metropolitan areas, with the prospect of amendments during the year likely. It offers new opportunities for planning and implementing agencies in the metropolitan area to develop relationships. It stimulates the active involvement in the process of not only regional planning agencies but also transit operators, central city planning units, and other subregional public agencies, but in the context of regional needs.

We think that this delivery system challenges intergovernmental relations in a healthy way. The legitimate participants in the process have a responsibility to spell out their respective roles, assuming they are to receive federal support. Therefore, we are urging that traditional memoranda of agreement be carefully evaluated and modifications in policy and technical control of the planning process be carefully considered.

Throughout the country new arrangements are being developed. In Atlanta, for example, the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, and the Atlanta Regional Commission have entered into a new agreement. In Boston, the state, the MBTA, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council are engaged in detailed negotiations aimed at identifying responsibilities for carrying forward, through plan refinement and implementation, the proposals of the Boston Transportation Planning Review.

In administering its technical study program, UMTA has supported regional planning agencies. We believe that, in doing so, we are fully consistent with evolving federal strategies. Not only is recognition of a single planning agency at the metropolitan level a primary departmental goal (and what better way to implement a goal than through a financial commitment), but also it is called for in a number of major reports, including the following.

1. The 1972 National Transportation Report. Secretary Volpe forwarded this report to Congress with a call for greater flexibility in the use of federal transportation resources by state and local officials. In commenting on the planning process the report notes: "In order for the results of the planning process to have meaning and be implemented, and in order for it to reflect the needs of local governments, these governments need access to funds to finance transportation improvements."

2. The Single Urban Fund Proposal.
3. The Pocono Conference.
4. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1972.
5. The revenue sharing.

So this is UMTA's perception of the planning process. We have reacted to the Secretary's goals for better intermodal planning by acting, not just by talking. We are (a) supporting with grant funds a single planning agency at the metropolitan level; (b) encouraging a pass-through concept whereby transit operators, central city planning agencies, and other subregional units can share in the transit planning action; (c) insisting on unified work programs as a basis for grant approvals; and (d) anticipating changes in policy and technical direction of the planning process in response to public transportation opportunities.