

AN ADVENTURE IN CREATIVE FEDERALISM: THE TRI-STATE-URBAN MASS TRANSPORTATION ADMINISTRATION STORY

J. Douglas Carroll, Jr., Tri-State Regional Planning Commission

•THE Tri-State Regional Planning Commission is both the comprehensive and the transportation planning agency for the metropolitan region surrounding New York City. It was established by passing the same act in each state legislature. The Commission is the metropolitan clearinghouse responsible for review of federal grant applications for conformance to plans. The region includes nine counties in New Jersey, seven counties plus New York City in New York State, and six planning regions in Connecticut.

Within the tri-state region, there are nearly 20 million residents, or one out of every 11 people in the United States. Within its 9,000 square miles, over 80 percent of the nation's rapid transit trips, nearly 60 percent of the suburban rail commuter trips of the nation, and about 25 percent of the local urban bus trips counted are made. Each day there are more than 9,000,000 trips made via public transportation facilities.

Doing this work are four railroad companies (of which three are bankrupt and one in public ownership), three rapid transit agencies, and more than 300 bus companies, not to mention a few ferries and about 15,000 taxis. There used to be much wider ownership of facilities, but the number of owners has been steadily shrinking through merger and public takeover.

In sum, in the tri-state region, there are many transit problems; there are many agencies with an interest in the provision of public transit; and the problems of planning are complicated and require extensive coordination because there are more than 600 incorporated areas.

Fortunately the three states have worked together since 1961 to establish regional land use and transportation plans, and they are currently straining to put the financing together to build and pay for the planned transit improvements. Present plans call for nearly \$9 billion just to complete the high-priority elements of a region-wide transit system and about \$8 billion more to finish the plan. This kind of money will be difficult to find; so it is important to squeeze the most out of every available dollar.

This was the setting in 1970 when the UMTA technical studies were significantly funded and UMTA tentatively proposed delivering them in each metropolitan area through a single agency, preferably the planning agency.

When this proposal came along, my fellow workers at the Commission reacted strongly to the suggestion. "Great! Let's agree to coordinate all UMTA technical study grants for our region," they said. They argued, "This would help to get a lot of things going that can improve transit service, and besides it will increase Tri-State's prestige to serve as the regional agency to coordinate all technical studies."

These seemed like good arguments at the time. However, it has been a much more difficult and complicated task than it seemed then. We currently have outstanding 32 separate grants for projects. They vary from as little as \$15,000 to as much as \$1,000,000 (Table 1).

The size of the program and the effort devoted to straight administration have been substantial; in fact, our total planning program has been bent toward UMTA work in the last 2 years. There are days when I look back and wonder whether we should not have been more circumspect. This feeling gets particularly heavy when a local mayor, impatient at bureaucratic process, gets on the phone and "hollers me out."

Table 1. Technical studies funded through Tri-State as of January 1973.

Category	No. of Projects	Value (dollars)
Long-range transportation planning	8	5,560,000
Short-range transportation planning	13	2,590,000
Preliminary engineering	5	2,150,000
Special studies	6	1,075,000
Total	32	11,375,000

Note: In addition, 16 more projects have been advanced to UMTA for funding. Their total estimated cost is \$8,600,000.

the question of priority. Requests usually exceeded potentially available funds, so some worthwhile projects had to be set back or rejected. Numerous local arguments on fair shares of available funds had to be weathered, and criteria had to be established to help sort the priorities of the many proposals we had (many of which we had helped to generate).

We also had to consider the obvious difficulty of inserting a planning agency between eligible public agencies and federal grants. How could this "extra player" justify the additional complications? I am sure we have not answered this question to the satisfaction of all local agencies, but we do see certain gains in meeting UMTA grant requirements. We are often better equipped to deal creatively with local problems because of knowledge of the local scene. In some instances, we have been able to revise our contract with UMTA so as to quickly execute a grant for a local government, drawing on already allocated UMTA funds by means of a budget revision.

We are slowly finding procedures that give greater assurance of project success. This includes techniques such as establishment of policy or steering committees that include representatives of the financing and working agencies as well as the planning and implementing agencies. Such participation generally improves the value of the facts and recommendations that are developed.

Another benefit lies in the fact that we have substantial supplies of data: official forecasts and machinery for estimating probable usage. These capabilities ensure that localities do not have to go to a consultant for this information and that a common body of facts is available to all. (An example of this is the special processing of 1970 census data for all parts of our region on journey-to-work records.)

Of course, the greatest value lies in the ability to encourage the use of these funds to actually implement the region's transit plan. Technical studies are evaluated when they are proposed according to the likelihood that they can lead to projects that improve transit service and conform to the region-wide plan and program.

All in all, this program of cooperative effort has been an exciting adventure; certainly it has been both stimulating and instructive. We have had to think and work harder than we had thought at first, and, though there are times when we wish we were not between UMTA and so many local applicants, there are also those cases where problems are solved, the pieces fall into place, and we can draw some satisfaction that things are moving toward a better regional transit system.

I spoke of making us think. For the coming year we have in mind extending the program that UMTA started to include the 23 subregional planning bodies in the region. From a region-wide planning viewpoint, the Commission is concerned with the major regional elements of a transit plan: railroad services, major subway lines, interstate commuter bus services, and special highway services such as exclusive lanes or ramp controls on freeways. These major elements are of concern to state departments of transportation and to major operating agencies such as New York's huge Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which operates the subways and buses of New York City, oversees the old Long Island Rail Road, has just established a new suburban bus operating agency, and owns and operates the Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority and several airports, as well as contracting with Penn Central for suburban rail service. Likewise, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey runs a subway between the two states, oper-

However, as time has gone on, we have adjusted. To an increasing degree, the Commission has been able to undertake part or all of a particular study by providing staff and support to involved local governments. This provision of state assistance has speeded up some work that would otherwise have had to wait for the longer course of consultant selection and contract approval. We hope to do more of this in the future.

One difficulty we faced early was

bus terminal, and has recently announced plans for a \$650 million transit expansion program. It takes major regional planning to fit all of these pieces into a rational plan for ever better transit service.

The authorities and the states that set them up are helping to bring the old numerous services that grew up under private financing into a fully integrated system, but there remains a great deal of important transit planning that has to be done locally. We look forward to a program where UMTA grants can help to support county and city planning efforts so as to ensure that there is local transit planning that conforms to local land use and transit plans.

The idea we are working on now is one in which counties organize the local aspects of transit planning and in which UMTA technical funds available for long-range planning can be passed through to the counties and planning regions to support this important local or subregional effort.

First it should be recognized that land use planning is highly integrated in the tri-state region. Not only are county plans reviewed for certification by HUD, but also we are entering into a process whereby regional land use plans and functional plans such as sewerage, parks, and highways are cross-adopted—i.e., the county or planning region board adopts the Commission's plan, and the Commission also adopts, by resolution, the county plan.

We visualize this working readily in the case of transit planning. The cities and/or counties (or planning regions in Connecticut) would prepare plans for local transit improvements. They would be concerned with local bus services, with services to certain disadvantaged or car-less families. They would locate or improve rail stations or both and plan for the adjacent parking. They would integrate land use and transit plans by planning for transportation centers, fringe parking, and other necessary transit elements. All of these plans would, of course, have to be coordinated with the regional system.

These planning efforts would be coordinated through the device of an annual work program wherein "701" funds and UMTA funds would be committed and where planning targets would be set for the year. Gradually this would extend into monitoring, updating, special studies—all of which would ensure a closer weaving of transit planning to localities and to local land use planning.

Following is a suggested outline of how this might go:

1. Each county prepares a local transit plan;
2. Local transit plan is consistent with county land use plan;
3. Local plan is consistent with regional plan (to be provided by the Commission);
4. Local transit plans should include bus service, stops, shelters, transportation centers (if any), and parking areas at transfer points as well as certain financing and support plans;
5. Service-density standards, data, and special skills will be provided by the Commission or operating agencies with the Commission's assistance;
6. Commission and counties decide on data required for annual monitoring and reporting and cooperate;
7. Special participation by cities of 50,000 or more would be authorized with county planning agency coordination;
8. Two-thirds of annual planning program will come from UMTA coordinated support grant, and one-third will be provided locally in cash or in kind;
9. Standard cooperating agreement will be executed between county and Commission (the Commission would reimburse regularly and, in turn, bill UMTA);
10. County plans could come in for certification by UMTA based on Tri-State Regional Planning Commission submission and comment;
11. Local transit plans and Commission's transit plans can be cross-adopted; and
12. Such plans would be part of the basis for future allocation of technical studies involving short-range planning, preliminary engineering, or special studies.

This kind of arrangement is attractive to us as a means for increasing participation by local officials and also as a means for implementing and coordinating region-wide plans. Realistic plans at the local level coordinated with the regional system will be

essential if transit funds are to deliver the kinds of improved services we all want in the future.

We at the Commission have welcomed the choice of UMTA to coordinate region-wide efforts; we have learned a lot. We believe that proper use of project reviews and forward planning will turn the federal support funds into a smoother program of improvements in the major metropolitan regions of the country.

One other comment may be in order. In our region we had the first three states to establish departments of transportation. They have all changed a great deal from their previous incarnation as highway or public works departments. Each of these states has developed special funding and special organizations to support a transit improvement program. These states, cooperating through the Commission, are in a position to reinvigorate the transit services and to bring truly balanced transportation programs to this metropolis.