

THE INTEREST OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION IN URBAN GOODS MOVEMENT

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The interest of the U. S. Department of Transportation in urban commodity flows developed soon after the department was formed 4 years ago. One goal at that time was (and is) to develop information and relationships so that we could look at transportation from a multimodal standpoint and estimate future demand for transportation on that basis. The total demand for transportation services of all kinds rests not only on individual modes as separate activities but also on their interaction with one another.

The Office of the Secretary sought, therefore, to determine the multimodal nature of the demand for transportation services on the basis of 2 categories: (a) origin and destination and (b) people versus freight. This suggests that, for domestic transportation, we usually consider the demands for intercity passenger travel, intercity freight movements, and urban or intracity passenger demand. One area very often neglected is that of the urban or intracity freight movement of goods.

When we do consider this fourth demand category, we tend to look at it from the standpoint of just truck movements in the city. In other words, when estimating the need for additional highway capacity, we have treated urban goods movements in much the same way we traditionally have dealt with intercity truck movements. When we consider the place of urban freight in the urban transportation planning process more carefully, we find it qualitatively quite different from both intercity freight movement and urban passenger travel. It is much more complicated than our conventional wisdom has led us to believe.

We know that interurban freight movements interfere with intercity passenger and freight flows as well as urban passenger travel. But we have devoted comparatively little effort to examining how this interference might be reduced with existing technology much less with innovation. We know that planning for urban growth requires transportation planning, but we do not know what an efficient urban freight distribution system would be like or what cost savings would be realized or how a city planned for cheaper commodity transportation would differ from the urban forms that we have today. We know that transportation of people and goods affects the environment, but we do not know what reductions in congestion, in air pollution, and in noise might result from different approaches to transporting freight, including comparatively modest proposals such as freight consolidation and centralized pickup and delivery.

What do we hope to accomplish with this conference? First, we hope to have a better understanding of the present goods system within urban areas. All of us engaged in the planning, regulation, and operation of transportation need to know a lot more about what types of goods are moved, how they are classified, what types of vehicles move them, when the goods are moved, and what cost factors are involved.

Second, we hope to enhance our knowledge of the critical relationships between urban goods movement and the environment in which they occur. On the one hand, we need to know how regulations, labor practices, different technologies, and urban form and structure affect the volumes and patterns of urban goods movements. On the other hand,

we need to know more about the impacts of freight movements on the urban community, including the effects of changes in the amount and type of urban freight facilities on the location of industries, residences, and suburban shopping centers. We also need to know the congestion and environmental pollution effects associated with the present rate of growth of urban truck transport.

Third, we hope to receive assistance in defining the proper role of the U. S. Department of Transportation with respect to urban goods movement. Should this role be limited to incremental transportation improvements of an operational nature dealing with restrictions on size and weight of trucks operating on urban streets and highways and with regulations of hours and access; or should more attention be devoted to improvements of a technical nature dealing with handling equipment or vehicle facilities? Is the present federal-aid program with its orientation toward the motor truck the best direction for the future? Should federal aid be provided for things such as tube or pipe delivery systems designed to transport dry solids? What are the institutional arrangements for moving goods? Should the federal government provide matching funds for projects to demonstrate innovations in urban goods transportation as well as urban passenger transportation? Should the Department of Transportation reexamine its relations with other federal agencies that have programs intimately related to urban commodity movement, for example, the urban renewal program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the air pollution standards program of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare?

Fourth, we hope to find out where we are hurting the most in this area. What are the gaps in our planning processes and the limitations of our forecasting tools? Where are the data deficiencies? Should the policies of the various levels of government be changed to adequately treat urban goods movements, and if so how?

Finally, we hope to provide a forum in which the varied groups can develop a better understanding of the urban goods transportation problem so that policies and strategies for meeting this problem can be developed.