action strategies and environmental values

introduction

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At the HRB Summer Meeting, a 4-member panel was given the assignment of bridging the gap between the work of compiling and analyzing data on the environment within transportation corridors and making decisions about development that will be allowed to occur in those corridors.

Their assignment does not say that models, such as those described in this report, are not beneficial in guiding decisions on location, design, and construction. Models are essential in assisting planners and administrators to organize and systematically consider the great and varied mass of data relating to transportation programs. But we do need to be reminded that the success of models depends as much on how well we have defined our values as on how we order and assign priorities to them.

This panel, therefore, was concerned with the basic values represented in 3 types of natural and man-made environments that have constituted unusual problems for highway planners and administrators: wildlife resources, parks and outdoor recreation facilities, and historic landmarks and preservation sites. Panelists were asked to describe briefly the nature and needs of the particular environmental resources with which they work and to relate these values to strategies for ensuring that these needs will be considered in transportation plans.

In a way their observations necessarily are 3 variations on the general theme—or strategy—of reconciling the demands of a modern urban industrial society with the needs of the ecosystems that the natural environment supports. This general theme, which underlies all action strategies for environmental quality, frequently is referred to as our "environmental ethic."

Vermonters are justly reputed to have refined this ethic to a fine point in both their public and private lives. It is fitting that the secretary of Vermont's Agency for En-

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vironmental Conservation presented an overview of this general viewpoint concerning man and his environment.

conservation: an overview

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I have been asked to perform the difficult task of providing the panelists a conceptual framework by using as a basis Vermont's landmark laws and experience with them during the past 2 years. That which is occurring in Vermont is not really much different from that which is occurring in the rest of the nation except for 2 elements:

1. We appear to be farther ahead than other states in making a realistic public commitment to environmental quality. We have action programs in all areas, most particularly in control and review of land use in both general and special categories.
2. Vermont is taking this action before major environmental catastrophe has struck and before it has become too late to do too much more than simply make a bad situation a little better.

As I see it, Vermont's commitment is attributable to 4 environmental principles. The first is a growing appreciation that for every action there is a reaction. That rule applies equally well in environmental matters as in physics. It is a new application of a common law, and it is gaining wide recognition from the public as well as from the committed professional. I need not recount the trends in public concern for the impact of highways. It is no longer simply a matter of evaluating environmental impact of the construction of a highway corridor. People want to know what the secondary effects will be: Where will development be stimulated? What kind of development will it be? What will development do to scenic quality? What will it do to the ability of a town to provide basic services such as police protection and solid waste disposal?

What is happening in Vermont is also based on Barry Commoner's environmental "law," which states "that there are no free lunches"; everything has its costs, and those costs must be weighed against the benefits. Developers in Vermont can no longer lull the apprehensions of communities by telling of the wonderful benefits that their development will bring—more taxes, more economic activity, more growth. The state has encouraged its communities to now ask developers and the towns themselves to perform this exercise of cost-benefit analysis. A good example is the recent controversy over an east-west superhighway from New York to Maine through Vermont. The consultants painted rosy pictures of the tremendous economic benefits that would accrue to Vermont from such a road. The costs were discounted or ignored at local, regional, and state levels. But, Vermont looked at some of the costs and found them too high. The proposal was rejected.

The third thing that is happening is grounded on the realization that environmental quality is not simply aesthetics or unpolluted air and water and is not simply the matter of protection of natural resources or fragile specialized areas. The environment is a composite of everything surrounding man—natural and man-made—and is not limited simply to physical things but encompasses all systems—social, governmental, and economic. And, on this matter, Vermonters are asking questions that pertain to the total environment. What will this development do to the town's fiscal condition? What will it do to the political or social characteristics of the community? How will it affect the region?

Finally, an ethic of wise stewardship for this and continuing generations is developing. Where is the community going? Where is the state going? What is it going to look like, not just tomorrow, but 30 or 40 years from now? Vermonters are looking at development projects no longer in isolation but from the perspective of the future. They are asking whether continuing development of a certain nature is consistent with