

INTRODUCTION

RALPH GAKENHEIMER

Associate Professor

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The Boston Transportation Planning Review (BTPR) was an experience in citizen participation and interdisciplinary planning. It was an 18-month study, which stretched from July 1971 to January 1973.

The emphasis in the papers that follow is on the way in which the intensive participatory approach of the BTPR has affected the various elements of the study. To introduce these papers, my first obligation is to affirm that indeed the Boston Transportation Planning Review was a participatory study by almost any measure of the phenomenon. The requirement of participation in a planning study has necessarily to be up for grabs among engineers and planners, depending on their ideological commitments; but, again by almost any nonpolemic definition of the word, the BTPR was a very participatory study. With regard to the exposure of technical work and technical decision-making to observation, public view, and comment by participatory community groups and regional interest groups; with regard to efforts at education of community and other participatory groups toward the participation in a transportation planning process; or with regard to the development of community-advocated options with respect to facility alternatives within the project corridor framework of the BTPR—by any of these criteria, the study was intensive in involvement of community interests. There were at least 300 formal community meetings held during the 18-month duration of the study, and I believe that approximately 35 percent of total staff time was devoted to involvement of the staff with community groups.

John Wofford will focus on the broader aspects of the process and its institutional participants and on how the process and the products of the BTPR sought to deal with the controversies with which it was charged. Stephen Lockwood will present the way in which participation affected the methodology of the BTPR. Walter Hansen will discuss the system management aspects of the study and in particular will focus on the kinds of facilities and improvements and proposals that emerged from an environment of intensive participation of this sort. Jason Cortell will comment on the ecological analysis in an environment of responsiveness to community interests. Finally, Allan Sloan will discuss the deployment of effort to the representation of community views, the kinds of releases from normal constraints and conceptualizations of solutions that occurred because of this form of the process, and a number of other characteristics that it showed.

There is one more general point that I might add that perhaps will help some of these topics, which otherwise might seem somewhat heterogeneous, to fall a little more easily into place. That concerns the division of work between the "traditional land use-transportation study" type of activity and the more localized project-level work that went on simultaneously at the BTPR. The background of the study in this connection is particularly interesting. In 1969, Governor Sargent of Massachusetts formed a task force to study the series of transportation controversies that existed in the Boston metropolitan area. The task force proposed 2 things important for present purposes: first, that the moratorium on further expressway construction within Mass-128 in the Boston metropolitan area be temporarily imposed with certain specified exceptions and, second, that the BTPR be mounted to determine what to do in those corridors covered by the moratorium.

The BTPR was proposed by the task force to consider the transportation problem in a very broad scope; it was to be an open, large-scale, flexible, expansive approach to transportation planning. The task force was followed by a study design committee, which developed in 1971 a proposal of more detailed programs for the BTPR but which was forced to come to terms more specifically with the project decisions that beset the commonwealth and most particularly the governor, who was committed to come to specific build/no-build conclusions on a set of 4 highly controversial expressways. The proposal, Study Design for a Balanced Transportation Development Program (which incidentally is a most interesting document), at the same time limited the exercise of more traditional land use-transportation planning techniques at the larger scale. Therefore, the BTPR has 2 elements in its background: (a) a larger scale, generous, expansive, flexible kind of format of study and (b) a mandate to settle very specific and highly controversial build/no-build decisions concerning expressways.

This latter aspect placed a very large proportion of the effort in the study on project-level consideration, which I think is one of its most innovative characteristics. The consequence of this dualism, this apparent paradox in the charge to the study, is that the regional aspects of the BTPR study are more a cumulative consequence of the process of study of phenomena at the local level than they are a prelude to that study (as formal planning methodology tells you it is supposed to be). The regional focus for local project selection that the study came up with in its latter stages and that enabled the definitively regionally focused set of decisions on the part of Governor Sargent in his decisions of November 30 was again more a secondary consequence of the process of study than it was a direct objective of the study in its early stages. This is a most important contribution of the BTPR. It is also, incidentally, a most important aspect of any study that is to be characterized by a high grade of participatory activity because participation really has to take place at a scale that is tangible to the participant.