PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BALANCED TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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The Boston Transportation Planning Review (BTPR)—its scope, its methods, its objectives—was both a product of its times and a forerunner of things to come.

In Boston, December 1969 was a time when Governor Sargent was considering a recommendation from the citizen task force that he had appointed. The recommendation was that he stop work on most of the expressways then under planning and construction inside of Mass-128 and that he order a restudy of the need for those expressways in a broad, open, multivalued, and multimodal context.

In Washington, this was the same month that the U.S. Congress enacted the National Environmental Policy Act.

It is one of my favorite themes in talking about the Boston Transportation Planning Review to note that both of these efforts were responses to the same set of problems—namely, intense controversy over the value placed on transportation improvements as compared with nontransportation values. In many ways, the Boston Transportation Planning Review was a precursor of what was to be set down in federal Policy and Procedure Memoranda 90-1 and 90-4 that outline procedural requirements remarkably similar to local procedures that we have slowly developed out of our own experience in the Boston area.

Early in 1970, following his consideration of the task force recommendation, Governor Sargent halted work on a number of controversial highway projects in the Boston area, and he established the BTPR to advise him on those controversies. He directed that the controversies be reviewed together as part of a balanced transportation program responding to the full range of metropolitan values, both transportation and nontransportation. He directed that the planning review process be open and broadly participatory so as adequately to reflect values, priorities, and competing proposals that the region's public agencies, private institutions, and private groups might wish to contribute.

The governor emphasized that he wanted the BTPR to give high priority to several key objectives: first, the integration of expressway planning with planning for arterial and local streets, parking, and public transportation; second, the integration of transportation planning itself with planning for housing, neighborhood amenity, environmental

protection, open space, and economic development; and, third, maximum participation by local governments and the public in the planning process. He directed that the process be an open one; that an interdisciplinary team of consultants be assembled to develop and compare widely different alternatives; that the consultants produce not a preferred solution but an analysis of the different alternatives from different value perspectives; that the analysis be subjected to critical review by public agencies and private groups; and that at the end of a specified period of time elected public officials, principally the governor himself, make decisions based on the analysis and response. The task of the consultants was not to give their judgment on what would be "the best" thing to do but rather to develop widely different alternatives to equal levels of detail, compare them as best they could, surface the comparison for public debate and discussion, and thereby provide the basis for informed decision-making by public officials.

In this sense the governor established a technical study and an open process all within a very political context, established deadlines, and placed principal responsibility for decisions with elected officials accountable as they are in a democracy to the electorate.

STUDY FRAMEWORK

Definition of Scope of Study

Our first task was to define the scope of the study. This was done in the open with an advisory, participatory working committee, which was to some extent self-created. It consisted of representatives of the key local governments affected by the corridors, state agencies with responsibility in nontransportation as well as transportation areas, and the most concerned private groups. The Working Committee met in the evenings during the summer of 1970 to reach a basic consensus on what the study should do and how it should do it. We felt that it was critical to write the scope of the study in the open rather than behind closed doors because in Boston we were all too familiar with previous studies where the very scope of the study was itself a matter of controversy. We sought to avoid that.

Selection of Multidisciplined Consultant Team

We then selected a team of consultants to do the technical work. That too was done with advice from an open participatory review committee. We received written proposals from 15 firms seeking the prime contract. These were read intensively by a review committee of about a dozen representatives of the public agencies, private groups, and local governments. We had oral review sessions with each consultant team; usually more people were on the interviewing panel than on the team representing the consultant. The panel was a rather mixed and unusual group whose members represented agencies ranging from neighborhoods to the state highway department. We achieved virtually a unanimous selection of who the prime consultant should be and, in particular, who the project manager should be. That was very much a matter of concern to the committee; we wanted to know who was actually going to run the technical team. (Walter Hansen was selected and has a paper later in this report.)

This process established confidence in the technical team on the part of the key participants; it also emphasized to the leader of the technical team that the client was not simply one state bureaucracy. One of the questions posed in the course of the review session with Walter Hansen and his team was, "Who is the client, Mr. Hansen?" He responded, "I don't know, but there always is one." It was a very diplomatic response, but in a way it turned out to be not a correct one because in fact there were many clients (Walt, I think, discovered that as the process went along). The state itself did not present a unified front: The transit agency was a client, the state highway department was a client, the new state secretary of transportation was a client, and the

governor's office was at least 3 clients. It was a complicated context of local bureaucratic politics in which the technical team had to operate.

Local Project Office

After selecting the team of consultants, we required that the team establish itself locally for the 18 months in one office location so that the interdisciplinary nature of the team could be facilitated and outside participants could locate project staff at a single place. The team included transportation planners, engineers, highway designers, urban designers, architects, economists, ecologists, experts in open space and preservation of historic landmarks, and lawyers.

Simplified State Administrative Procedures

On the state's part, we established a simplified administrative procedure to expedite project approvals. We pooled the highway and transit fund sources to simplify billing and accounting and to ensure flexibility in the expenditure of project funds to meet changing needs as the study progressed. We created what we called the Project Coordinating Committee composed of a representative of the highway department, a representative of the transit agency, and a representative of the state secretary of transportation. Representatives of the Federal Highway Administration also attended the committee meetings as observers; had the Urban Mass Transportation Administration at that time had regional field representatives, they too would have attended as observers. I represented the secretary of transportation and was chairman of the committee. We were delegated the power of approval on most administrative matters and, in many cases, could simply sign the papers. We received requests for administrative approvals to hire people and to embark on certain courses of work, and we tried to approve everything as expeditiously as we could.

Community Liaison and Technical Assistance Staff

We established a separate staff for community liaison and technical assistance early in the study; it accounted for about 10 percent of the project budget and was quasi-independent on management and policy matters. The staff was under the contractual management of the prime contractor but on all policy matters reported directly to me and to our working committee. There was a potential for battles between the community liaison staff and the prime staff, but it did not work out that way. In fact, they worked very closely together in a cooperative and productive relation. One of the principal jobs of the community liaison staff was to get the prime staff to respond effectively to the wishes of community participants. Because they were out in the community just as much as the community liaison staff were, the prime staff responded not only effectively but enthusiastically.

Open Information

We had a policy of absolutely open information. There was no clearance procedure established for the release of information. Technical drafts were made available just as they were; they stood as the product of the staff who had prepared them, and neither approval nor disapproval was implied. The staff analysis in draft form was simply there for all to react to. This turned out to be very useful both to the consultant team and to me. That magic word "draft" covered a multitude of sins and let us get very effective feedback both from public and private sectors.

Working Committee

We formalized the Working Committee to oversee the process; it met on a weekly basis. The membership was broadened to include highway contractors, highway labor unions, and highway user groups; only one of the latter groups joined and attended several sessions, but did not actively participate. The Working Committee reached an amazing degree of consensus on all issues of process and on most issues of scope and emphasis. The one issue on which there was wide disagreement was the question of whether the meetings of the Working Committee would be open to the press. In the end, I decided that in an open process the deliberations of the Working Committee should be open and we would take the risks of speaking frankly to each other, which was one of the purposes of those meetings, and trust to the good sense of those reporters who could endure coming week after week.

There was also an amazing degree of consensus among the different groups on the product that they wanted. I remember being visited by a delegation of three, representing the city of Boston, the highway contractors, and the coalition of antihighway neighborhood groups. All of them had agreed on a set of products that they wanted: detailed engineering drawings of the highways so that an effective comparison could be made between build and no-build options and a new transit master plan. Nobody walked out of our process during the 18 months, although some had predicted that would happen. People with different views really did come to know each other as people and to understand the bases from which they spoke. They also had no real choice but to participate because the governor had made it clear that it was on the basis of this process that he would reach his decisions.

Phases for Study and Decisions

We divided the study into phases. The early phase was devoted to getting a better understanding of the transportation needs and issues and to searching for alternative solutions to the problems. We established a device of writing issue papers, which were then widely circulated. All sides, public and private, would then let us know whether we had missed the point or had proposed some ridiculous solutions or had failed to understand some community proposals. It was a very useful way of getting a better sense of what the issues and the possibilities were. At the end of phase 1, we produced formal but preliminary documents that indicated our understanding of the problems, options for solution, and suggestions of what might be cut out as we narrowed down to a few alternatives for more intensive comparison in phase 2. This document was sent out for responses, and then the governor made a decision on what would be carried into phase 2.

Phase 2 was a detailed comparison, sufficient to meet requirements for environmental impact statements, of no-build, medium-build, and big-build decisions. Those weighty documents became the major product of the study. They were circulated formally and were then the subject of testimony at formal public hearings prior to the governor's decisions, which he made just after Thanksgiving of 1972.

Phase 3 consisted of the wrap-up of the study during which we completed our work and moved toward implementation of the governor's decisions.

Variety of Types of Meetings

We had hundreds of meetings and a wide range of contacts, including telephone calls directly to the staff; neighborhood workshops; sessions with mayors, councillors, and legislators; formal information meetings; and public hearings. Often the most useful conversations at the meetings took place during coffee breaks with people who were reluctant to stand up in public and say what they thought. The meetings conveyed information, provided an interim deadline for useful work by the consultant team, and served to keep the focus on the technical product.

Program Package Choices

The product was in the form of "program packages." These were multimodal choice packages, i.e., alternatives that included parking policy and transit and highway programs, each in a package that responded in a different way to different values that participants held. Our objective was in each instance to produce a package that each of our major participants could identify with and favor so that there would be at least one alternative about which a major interest group could say, "That is what we are for." We would thus avoid the usual response at public hearings, "We are opposed to what you are proposing." This was done with some, but not complete, success, given the natural suspicion that participants have of whatever the government is doing. I remember one meeting in East Boston where we had come to show our options for a third harbor crossing. They said to us, "Don't you come back to East Boston until you have an option that says 'No harbor crossing'." And, indeed, we developed such an option, a program package to show how one might get to and from Logan Airport without building a third harbor crossing. In the end it was not a package that the governor selected, but the analysis that was needed to produce that package turned out to be very useful as we prepare for an interim period of many years before a new harbor crossing is ready for use. The package included a bus-limousine type of service from pickup points in the outer area. Vehicles would be speeded on special reserved lanes and be given head-of-the-line privileges at the existing tunnel entrances.

Corridor Issues in a Regional Framework

There was continual tension during the study regarding corridor and regional issues. There were some participants who wanted regional analyses to precede and substantially determine the corridor solutions. Others believed that extensive attention to regional analysis would lead to the kind of "master planning" that had helped produce the present controversy. Our response was to attempt to strike a balance. Clearly, our controversies were corridor controversies stemming from very specific existing project proposals, and the major part of our attention was devoted to detailed comparison of corridor impacts, including, of course, detailed consideration of the traffic implications of corridor facilities on the Boston core. Our regional studies sought to provide the transportation and land use context for the corridor analyses, but to describe long-range alternative futures (continued suburban sprawl, more concentrated downtown development, suburban development nodes) so that people could use as one factor in reaching their own corridor preferences their assessment of the relation between the facility decision and their view of the future. It was a delicate balance, but one that I believe kept us focused on the corridor decisions that the governor had to make while we set those decisions in a longer range perspective. It is no exaggeration to note that value differences over what the future could and should be like were every bit as intense as different weights given by different participants to various corridor impacts. It is also true that we would have given less attention than we did to regional and long-range concerns had our participants been less vocal in their insistence on wishing to help to shape the future through the immediate decisions confronting the governor.

Criteria, Values, and Cost-Benefit Analysis

We decided not to attempt to reach agreement on weighting different criteria in a mathematical cost-benefit formula. We believed such an attempt could lead only to endless debate, for the weight given to different factors in decisions like these generally determines the outcome. We opted, instead, for a checklist of major impact categories and detailed descriptions of each such impact. Participants could then assess the seriousness of the impact, whether positive or negative, in terms of their own values. We did perform more traditional cost-benefit analyses of transportation costs and

benefits, but only as one element in a more qualitative approach to social decision-making.

Pre-Review of Draft Environmental Impact Statements

The real test of our participatory process came after the staff had completed its technical work and had ready for printing the draft environmental impact statements in which different program package choices were compared for each major controversy. The Working Committee, sensing that this was a critical moment, asked that it be given an opportunity to review the drafts and make modifications in them before they were printed. The technical staff resisted because we were under intense pressure to meet the governor's deadlines, but we decided to give the committee 2 weeks to review and comment on the drafts while the final artwork was being prepared. It was a group review. The state agencies and the other participants had identical deadlines. Knowing that a printed document had to be produced, the committee was able to focus on defects in the draft, suggest modifications, and substitute language, but to understand the difference between those suggestions that we did not have time to accommodate and those that we did. This intensive 2-week review, which was done page by page and line by line while the staff held the red editorial pencil amidst a group of participants having widely different preferences, was responsible for many very significant improvements in the draft. Indeed, this review served as the final catalyst that forced the many technical disciplines to confront their value differences and to produce a draft that attempted to face directly the irreconcilable value conflicts that remained after consensus had been pushed until it could go no farther. In this sense, the participatory nature of our study was an essential ingredient in the multidisciplinary nature of the products.

Formal Public Hearings

We finally had the draft statements printed; circulated them to approximately a thousand federal, state, and local agencies, officials, and groups; waited the required 30 days; and then held formal public hearings. The hearings on all corridors took 10 days; an afternoon session and an evening session were held at each location. Some of the evening sessions continued until one o'clock in the morning. Although the predominant number of speakers opposed further expressway construction, the full spectrum of views was represented. The hearings were conducted under the joint auspices of the secretary of transportation, the highway department, and the transit agency. For the most part, the hearings were like any other hearings except that they were based on 18 months of prior participation. It is a tribute to that participation that the hearings produced no real surprises.

I think it is a very useful feature of this kind of a participatory process to have it climaxed by formal public hearings. For us they served at least 5 functions. First, they were a summary and a formal record of what had gone before in terms of both substance and process. Second, and even more important, they were a formal milestone, a signal to both public and private participants that we were about to make a decision and move on to a new stage. Their message was, "Speak now or forever hold your peace." Third, they provided a forum for leaders of constituencies to be seen and heard by their constituents and to make the points in public that they had been making in working committee sessions for many months. That was an essential ingredient in their continued credibility, a kind of proof that they had not been co-opted. Fourth, they served as dramatic preparation for the governor's decisions that would follow in about a month. Fifth, the public hearings near the end of the process were safeguards to make us all take seriously the participatory process during the previous months, for otherwise we would have been faced with a written public record filled with claims of nonparticipation, a record that would necessarily accompany the project through all the later required approvals and possibly into the federal courts. Thus, the public hearings for us were not the participatory process but rather the capstones of that process.

The Governor's Decision Process

Finally, we had the process of briefing the governor and his reaching a decision. As a result of more specific federal environmental criteria and our eagerness to apply those criteria, we decided to produce the full draft environmental impact statements before the governor's decisions rather than after his decisions. This meant that the timetable slipped by 4 months and his decisions were made at roughly the 16-month point instead of the 12-month point. Between the printing of the draft environmental impact statements and his decisions, we provided intensive briefings for a special task force that he had established to advise him. The task force was composed of the lieutenant governor, the secretary of transportation, and the governor's special assistant for urban affairs. The interesting thing about those briefings was that we said essentially the same things to that task force as we had been saying to the public and to the working committee.

There was one exception: The task force requested members of the technical team to state what they would do if they were governor. So we arranged for each of the major disciplines to be represented by one person and for that person to speak individually. The task force wanted not a consensus recommendation but individual views and reasons for those views. It should come as no surprise that there was a wide range of views! I think that is really the essential point of the environmental impact statement process and the planning review process: to establish a reasoned dialogue where technical data are exposed to different value premises and where people are required to give reasons for what they want to have happen.

We then met with the governor for a number of special briefings, and I can say that he personally involved himself in great detail in the issues and clearly came to his own judgment for his own reasons. During that period, too, we arranged to have 6 meetings between the governor and our main participants, three with groups representing the antihighway side and three with groups representing the prohighway side. As we had done in the technical briefings, the participants, too, made the points to the governor in private that they had been making to us during the course of the study.

The governor then made his decisions and announced them on statewide television. Essentially, he decided that there will be no more general-purpose expressways in the inner core because he believed they would have too detrimental an impact on the quality of life. Preserving open space in the face of increasing urban density and preserving neighborhoods in the face of decreasing sense of community were two important objectives. In addition, he was personally very concerned about drivers stuck in rush-hour traffic, and he came to believe that public transportation would be a better alternative for those working in Boston's concentrated downtown. His transportation program, therefore, relies primarily on using rail transit for access to the downtown, freezing downtown parking spaces, establishing a fringe parking strategy, and improving an existing extensive commuter rail system—all to become part of a truly integrated highway and transit and commuter rail network.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Our process was designed to deal with controversy, and we found it very useful to take federal law seriously because that law, too, is an attempt to deal with controversy. I noted earlier the relation between the planning review and the environmental impact statement process. The essential features of both processes are openly considering alternatives and rigorously analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each to equal levels of detail and in writing; including a no-build alternative as a way of focusing on whether a facility is needed, what the effects would be of leaving a situation unchanged, and what the larger value assumptions are of the proposed course of action; and holding public hearings and providing other opportunities for participation (e.g., as in our case, a special staff for technical assistance and community liaison) and for exposing this analysis to criticism and public controversy prior to commitment on the part of the government to proceed with the project.

This process is obviously directly contrary to standard bureaucratic practice in the past. I intend this not as an attack on past practice but rather as a description of the fact that the past process does not comply with new values and new criteria. In the old process, alternative courses of action were considered, but in a closed setting. There was little pressure to pursue apparently difficult alternatives, and written analysis served chiefly to justify previously made conclusions. A no-build alternative in the past was given little attention because the agencies felt that the need to build had already been established, that their assumptions were above question, and that their mission (on which promotions were based, success was measured, and satisfaction was achieved) was to bring projects to fruition. Finally, hearings and public participation in the past were permitted, but only after all the significant decisions were made. They were then just endured and generally resulted in nothing more than minor modifications. In this sense, an environmental impact statement, like the planning review, is designed to change these past practices so that controversy is surfaced rather than submerged.

2. The second general observation is that our objective of dealing openly with controversy and of developing widely different alternatives is not easy to achieve. Technicians have not been accustomed to preparing alternatives with their own personal judgment kept to a minimum. I think they found it difficult but learned during our process to articulate the value and policy assumptions that often are hidden in their methodology in a way that people could understand. That was a challenge. An even more difficult challenge was to deal with statutory policy as a variable rather than as a given. We made it clear from the beginning that we wanted recommendations in the program packages that would include changes in law—both state and federal. That kind of product gets the technician into a new area of policy analysis. Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 is, of course, the most dramatic example of the need for such analysis. The words "feasible" and "prudent" clearly call for value and policy judgments. Our challenge was to do the Section 4(f) analysis in a way that allowed the determination of what was prudent to be made by the participants, public and private, and not by the consultants. The unanimous Overton Park case, which was handed down just before the study began, emphasized the importance of the nontechnical as well as technical aspects of the search for and comparison of "feasible and prudent alternatives." Our technical staff, in short, discovered new ground rules when they became a part of the Boston Transportation Planning Review.

3. Expectations on all sides were raised beyond our capacity to produce. All sides—the highway agencies, the contractors, the antihighway groups—wanted more details in the end than we could produce with limited money, limited time, and limited staff energy. The prohighway side wanted especially more information on economic development potential of the expressways; the antihighway side wanted more information on air quality impacts. Analyses in both areas (air pollution and economic predictions) must incorporate a great deal of uncertainty about the future, and we felt that extensive studies would not be of great value. We thus had the job of damping expectations, but in an even-handed manner. I think maybe we succeeded in leaving everyone a little bit dissatisfied, but equally so.

4. In this kind of process, personality plays a huge role, both positive and negative. The impact of staff personalities on public and private participants was a factor to be taken into account, and the impact of the participants' tones had an impact on staff work and responsiveness. I think we all learned to take a lot of brickbats in stride, but it was not always easy. Those who throw the brickbats often do not calculate their effect on people who are themselves doing a job and trying to produce a product. Those of us on the receiving end of such attacks, however, must remember that when we face the public we do represent "the government" with all the negative feelings that term often connotes. Thus, the interaction of individual personalities is complicated in a process like this by the view each has of the other's institutional base.

5. The product and the policy were much better for the participatory process. I think in the end we achieved what we basically had set out to do: informed decision-making on the part of the governor and reasoned debates on the part of the participants. When the governor made his decisions, he had a good grasp both of the technical details and of the views that different groups would have about different policy conclusions. In

that sense we were kind of political advance men for the governor ("political" is used in the best sense, i.e., understanding what different groups in the electorate felt and would like to achieve). And those groups contributed significantly to the definition of the alternatives compared and to the debate over which one to choose.

6. As we increasingly utilize this kind of process, special attention should be given to the training of technically competent people for 2 key ingredients of that process: citizen participation and policy analysis. This is not easy; most of our universities do not undertake this kind of training. The most effective training currently available is the kind of laboratory experience that we have had in Boston and that others are having in a number of cities in dealing with concrete controversies. But earlier and more systematic training in skills related to these objectives would be extremely desirable.

7. In conclusion, let me note that, under federal Policy and Procedure Memorandum 90-4, each state must submit a plan showing how it will permanently incorporate into its highway planning the major elements we have used in the Boston Transportation Planning Review: a systematic interdisciplinary process; opportunities for participation by citizens and local governments; consideration of widely different alternative solutions in a truly multimodal framework; and a clear decision-making process. Significantly, this plan is called an Action Plan. In Boston during this 18-month study, we had a good deal of action. We trust that the policy decisions that emerged from our process will be turned into action as we move to implement Governor Sargent's decisions.

We hope, too, that some of the lessons we have learned in Boston will be useful as others increasingly move in this direction. Obviously, the large scope of our study related directly to the large scale of the controversial facilities (one cannot undertake a $3.5 million study frequently). Nevertheless, I believe that most of the ingredients and lessons of the Boston Transportation Planning Review do in fact have relevance to most transportation controversies—regardless of the size, complexity, or mode of the particular services or facilities being considered. And I am convinced that a process substantially similar to ours is essential to producing the "action" and results we all want. There is, in other words, a middle course between stalemate on the one hand and the old way on the other—a course that the Boston Transportation Planning Review has helped to chart.