Introduction to the Conference Proceedings

C. Michael Walton, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Texas at Austin

This conference represented the first major attempt to bring together professionals experienced and knowledgeable in transportation planning methodologies and techniques applicable to small and medium-sized places. The importance of this endeavor has been underlined by the creation by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the committee on transportation planning needs and requirements of small and medium-sized communities approximately four years ago. This committee was created in response to the expressed concern of many transportation planners and engineers for more attention by the various governmental agencies and the professional community to the many smaller cities having populations of fewer than 200,000. This new TRB committee is charged with balancing what many feel to be an inordinate emphasis on the problems and issues of the larger metropolitan areas.

The objectives of this conference were to provide for the exchange of experiences among a sample of practitioners engaged in transportation planning for cities of fewer than 200,000 people, to provide guidance for transportation policies and programs, to foster the development of future activities in this area and, lastly, to provide a document that will reflect the proceedings of the conference and serve as a basic resource for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers.

To achieve these objectives a program was designed that would identify and attract many types of individuals, experiences, technical expertise, and functional areas. An extensive survey was made of governmental agencies at all levels, private business, consulting firms, and the general professional community to identify people, techniques, and issues pertinent to the established objectives. After many follow-up contacts and evaluations, a list of resources by functional areas was compiled. The functional areas were transit operations planning, traffic planning and operations, surveillance and socioeconomic forecasting, systems planning, and plan implementation. Implicit in the conference design was the importance of focusing on the issues pertinent to transportation planning in smaller cities, the levels of effort to be allocated, and the techniques that have been found to be both effective and efficient.

The difficulty inherent in the design concept was the tendency of many conferences to deal primarily with policy issues while often failing to achieve other equally important objectives, such as the discussion of techniques. To balance the program, workshops in each functional area were structured into two sessions—one on issues and levels of effort and the other on techniques. Invited participants were assigned to one functional area for the conference duration. Plenary sessions provided an opportunity for general sharing of workshop experiences and group interaction.

The conference opened with a keynote address on the federal perspective of planning for transportation in small and medium-sized communities by Hassell that set the overall theme for the conference and provided the foundation for the plenary session papers. This was followed by the paper by Dees concerning the products of the transportation planning process from the state perspective and the one by Stayer on the appropriate level of planning effort in smaller cities. These papers provided the catalysts for the workshops, which began by discussing issues and levels of effort pertinent to the functional workshop area. Resource papers were also used to aid the workshop deliberations. The second half of the conference was allocated to workshop activities on techniques. Resource papers were used to foster the discussions and interactions, and plenary sessions followed each workshop session so that all the participants could share in a summary of the activities that took place in other workshops.

These proceedings are an attempt to capture the spirit of the conference activities. The key addresses are provided, as are the resource papers presented in the workshops. The discussions and resultant interactions have been summarized and are included because they are as important as the formal papers.

Conference Summary

C. Michael Walton, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Texas at Austin

Because of the ever-increasing importance of balancing the resources for transportation investments against the total range of transportation needs, planners at all levels of government are focusing greater attention on small- and medium-sized communities. The opportunities inherent in the characteristics of cities of 200,000 people
or fewer suggest a modification of the planning tech-
niques and procedures for larger areas. Contrary to
the needs of larger metropolitan areas, smaller places
require less sophisticated techniques and methodologies
for most transportation planning activities. One reason
for difficulties experienced in past planning for trans-
portation in smaller places has been in the uniform ap-
lication of the traditional comprehensive, continuing,
and cooperative (3C) approach. Often this approach
lacks sensitivity to local concerns and issues and re-
results, consequently, in an unimplementable planning
document. The momentum of the traditional process,
administratively and technically, is difficult to alter.
However, as discussed in the paper by Fleet and others,
a beginning has been made, at all levels of government,
and in many locations around the country.

A city of 100,000 people is a very large place to a
community of 2500. The process of identifying a trans-
portation planning program and appropriate techniques
by city size emphasizes the need to provide greater
flexibility in local determination of needs and responses.
Each community, regardless of its size, has its own
problems and priorities, although these are often im-
plicit and difficult to ascertain by outside professional
transportation planners. Increasingly, transportation
problems at this level are perceived by local officials
as part and parcel of other community development
problems. Thus, the balancing of long-range versus
short-range planning is more a functional activity of the
local area than an administrative requirement. The
scale of transportation planning activities must reflect
this local perspective.

In the 1970s, one of the major trends evident in the
migration pattern in the United States has been the flow
of people to smaller cities and rural areas. This re-
versal of earlier trends has been confirmed by popula-
tion estimates, employment statistics, and sample sur-
vveys. The increased employment opportunities in
services, trade, and construction, in addition to accessi-
bility to nearby metropolitan areas, have been suggested
as one reason for the reversal. Life-style objectives
have been proposed as another reason for the out-
migration from larger cities to smaller ones and rural
areas. Of importance is the fact that the small and
medium-sized cities are growing and growing at an av-
erage national rate almost twice that of the larger metrop-
olitan areas. Regional trends reflect significant vari-
ations; in the sunbelt, the southern and western areas
of the United States, there is both increased population
growth in the smaller places and the development of new
metropolitan areas. The implications and influences of
these shifts are significant but not completely under-
stood. The significance of these trends on transpor-
tation planning and potential investment supports the con-
cern of many professionals who have advocated flexi-
bility, simplicity, and local determination.

The recognized need for a less formalized trans-
portation planning process for smaller urban areas is
strongly supported in the paper by Hassell. The im-
portance of this paper is in the mandate for (a) greater
flexibility in organization and administrative arrange-
ments; (b) improved communication between the decision
maker, the planner, and the general public; and (c) sim-
plification in the administrative planning requirements
as well as simplified planning procedures. The per-
ceived changing role of transportation planning pro-
cesses has led to a changing role for the Federal High-
way Administration—the contribution to planning pro-
cedures responsive to local goals and concerns.

From a state perspective, Dees presents many of the
concerns and frustrations that result from the failure of
the traditional transportation planning process to meet
the needs of smaller areas. The theme of local deter-
mination and a responsive program reflective of local
goals and priorities is a requirement for an effective
planning process. Stover, in assessing the appropriate
level of effort, also dismisses the value of a uniformly
applied transportation planning process and suggests
guidelines for the planning effort as a function of the
growth characteristics of the city and local problems.

Many similar findings and recommendations were
noted in the various workshops, such as the needs for

1. Improved communication between the planner and
the decision maker;
2. Local determination of goals, problems, and
planning processes;
3. Sharing of technical assistance among various
public and private entities;
4. Sharing of techniques;
5. Reduction in the administrative burden inherent
in the transportation planning process; and
6. Flexibility in the use of available financial-aid
programs.

The recognition of the need for greater local under-
standing, participation, and use of technical expertise is a
major objective of the emerging transportation planning
era for small and medium-sized cities. This can no
longer be accomplished by the use of overly complex
and unrealistic long-range plans that, because of finan-
cial and other institutional problems, can be imple-
mented only with difficulty.

A variety of proven techniques is available that can
improve many local planning efforts. Some of these are
included in this report. They range from the more
traditional traffic-engineering procedures to the use of
synthetic procedures based on data retrieved from
secondary sources. The opportunity to integrate trans-
port planning operations (where appropriate) into the
transportation planning process for smaller areas may
stimulate consideration of alternatives pertinent to
addressing energy- or environment-related issues.
Opportunities for other local participation, including
those involved in the administration of local land-use
controls, should also be pursued. The significance of
this conference and its proceedings rests in the actions
and reactions of the professional and local officials. The
intent has been to acknowledge awareness, foster inter-
action, and stimulate implementation of a more
workable transportation planning process and decision
structure.