In small and medium-sized communities, it is particularly necessary to document transportation planning carefully. Much of the need for this documentation centers around the skepticism of the public and government about planners in general. Planners are often considered to be nonessential and are frequently ignored.

**ROLES THAT PLANNERS CAN TAKE**

A number of positive steps can be taken to change the ways in which planners are perceived. First of all, planners should increase the technical assistance they provide to implementers. They should provide the kind of information that can and should be used in the decision-making process, which would establish them as reliable resource people. Second, planners should strive to reply and respond to decision makers quickly. This need for quick response cannot be overstated; every possible step must be taken to assist local officials in dealing with the public and the media. Third, planners should attempt to be more effective in the project selection process and to consider the politics of the situation in their choices of projects.

All of this requires planners to be more sensitive to the needs of the decision makers. Often planners cannot respond to the problems presented to them because they do not have an adequate understanding of their audience. They sometimes do not follow the real meaning of a question as the citizen or local official actually put it.

Planners are often too insulated from the local perception of the problem as opposed to their own technical perception of it.

Planners should have an understanding of dollar flow and of the process by which local elected officials distribute funds. They would also do well to approach a project in a low-key manner—particular programs should not be pushed. Transit, more often than not, is best approached in a soft-sell manner.

Free and open communication is of great importance to the success of any planning effort. Many times communication is hampered by lack of knowledge, which in turn can cause an overreliance on regulations. If planners do not or cannot talk to local elected officials, they tend to hide behind the planning process and it becomes a barrier to communication. Local officials in a small city are naturally more accessible than those in a large city. This characteristic of smaller communities should be seen as very positive, and full use should be made of any opportunities to communicate.

Another difficulty that arises is the combination of the complexity of federal, state, and local regulations coupled with the complexity of the long-range and short-range planning processes. And added to the problem is the sometimes short tenure of local officials (which naturally stifles their interest in longer-range solutions). Planners must be sensitive to all these questions and attempt to communicate on all levels with the local elected officials with whom they are dealing.