

Part 1: Conference Purpose

Introduction to the Conference

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Urban public transportation demands and requirements in the 1980s will differ significantly from those known to date. Such issues as shifts from system expansion to system rehabilitation in consideration of slower economic and traffic growth and constraints on finances will have major impacts on public transportation. Also, the role of the private sector in the provision of urban transportation has been the subject of growing interest, having been triggered by a combination of factors--the new budgetary climate at all levels of government and the increasing realization by the private sector that a well-functioning public transportation system is essential to the continuing growth of the urban economy. Urban public transportation is a subject of increasing concern to transportation officials, state and local elected officials, community leaders, and the general public because of increasing local subsidy requirements in the face of reduced revenues. Traditional solutions are being questioned and new solutions are being sought.

The concerns expressed about urban public transportation are wide ranging. Future prospects in urban public transportation call for an evaluation to ensure that public transportation remains a workable element of the urban infrastructure. To provide this needed evaluation, TRB was asked by UMTA to convene this conference on the future directions of urban public transportation.

The specific objective of the conference is to investigate the near-term outlook and policy options for urban public transportation facilities and services over the next decade and beyond. A series of five overview stage-setting papers were prepared on the subjects of energy and communications, land use and transportation, economic base, public finance, and the future of urban public transportation. These papers were summarized by the conference consultant at the start of the meeting, and the authors were given the opportunity to comment or to clarify their views. This material, including the five overview papers, is contained in Part 4 of these proceedings. In addition, a series of five issue papers directly related to various urban public transportation issues was prepared and summarized by the authors at the conference. Edited versions of these papers appear in Part 5 of these proceedings.

Building on these background materials and presentations, the conference participants began a dialog in an attempt to reach consensus on future directions. The first step in the dialog was a plenary session discussion of recent trends and conditions that have been contributing to the difficulties now facing public transportation. This discussion is summarized in Part 2. After that session the conference participants broke into small discussion groups to begin the strategic planning process that resulted in the conclusions summarized in Part 3.