Partnership and Partnership Development: ISTEA and CAAA— Breakthrough or Mire?

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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), which has been coupled with the implementation of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA), offers both risk and opportunity in an America in which citizens have become frighteningly distanced from government. The call for better planning and more efficient application of increasingly scarce government resources has been accompanied by a decline in publicly supported regional planning mechanisms. This trend is due in part to the close association perceived between regional planning mechanisms and the bureaucratic processes and programs that were blamed for the failure of the War on Poverty.

Doing it right this time includes several requirements. First, the federal system was designed primarily to prevent leadership conspiracies. It only works when the public grants clear and sustained permission. Public permission requires an understandable process that occurs in a visible place with understandable outcomes and definite progress. The notion of partnerships—and the examples of community success that engendered the partnership concept—requires following some basic guidelines:

1. Symptom-relieving programs will not work. An investment strategy focused on problem identification, explicit goals, and joint investment with clear, immediate success will.

2. Most problems do not correspond to government boundaries. The best solutions come from places where a community of interest forms across governmental boundaries and delivers solutions to governmental bodies for action. Communities of interest generally occur in real places that have names, as opposed to areas known as the "five counties of _____," for example. The authors of ISTEA want to resurrect metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). The degree to which MPOs represent real places and develop real identities is probably the degree to which they will succeed.

3. The actual decision-making process must be visible and understandable to the public. The nation will not support another federal intervention failure. Experiments like the Kettering Foundation's Negotiated Investment Strategy (NIS) show how the federal system can work effectively. NIS employed (a) a neutral facilitator; (b) a condensed, efficient time frame; (c) a process adapted from the most successful negotiations experience (single-text negotiation); (d) face-to-face negotiations (no protracted sequential approval processes); and (e) signed public agreements (clear evidence of achievement).

ISTEA is especially important as the nation's leaders refocus on the need to bring inner cities back into the mainstream. The mainstream itself is not doing well, which complicates the picture. A great deal of the complex equation for economic development depends on transportation and transportation-related investment. A great opportunity exists to use ISTEA to stimulate economic recovery and greater equity. The opposing potential for stalemate is also great and would result in even more public rejection and distancing. The lessons from past experience are clear. Applying them now is critical.

THE CHALLENGE

The development of ISTEA combined with CAAA represents a potential sea change in transportation planning in America, especially urban America. Its impact depends on the degree to which MPOs can become effective political decision-making bodies—bodies that encourage citi-

zen involvement, awareness, support, and constructive interaction of organized community interests.

The immediate past history of MPOs is disappointing. Despite all the rhetoric about the need for better planning and foresight in virtually all of urban and rural America, when the federal government stopped requiring a local planning process (A-95), many places dropped back from any commitment to and support of regional planning. The planning capacity of most MPOs has degenerated during the last several years. Those that survived have generally survived as innovators of cooperative technical assistance. They have become technical pass-through bodies for limited decision options and have attracted only mild interest from interest groups and local officeholders. The prospect of what they could become with the implementation of ISTEA and CAAA would enormously challenge the leadership now administering these bodies. They could easily become the most important place for regional leaders to engage each other in framing important issues. The implications of the latter are perhaps best expressed by the results of two surveys conducted by the National League of Cities during the past several years. In each survey, the number one problem expressed by local officials was getting along with each other.

ISTEA and CAAA call for decentralization of key decisions that shape land use—transportation and highway facilities—to MPOs. This would place political decisions within easy reach for conflicting interests, local press, and local citizens—something never done before in the United States. In the previous local planning process, MPOs were only given the opportunity to review and comment. ISTEA could cause the real decisions to be made through the local political process.

The ISTEA/CAAA combination also para-positions air quality and mobility—two major interests of local leadership. Some even believe that it gives air quality preferred status, although that remains to be seen. In any case, access has been the economic development issue that does most to ignite the passion of private-sector leadership. The rights and interest of the disabled for mobility and access to jobs and community amenities is only now being recognized. Countless surveys and focus groups show the strong latent support of citizens for stronger environmental measures (conversations with James Shanahan, Director of the Urban Center, University of Akron). Clean air may be the flagship of the baby boom, which is now coming into political power in most local governing bodies. They will be at the table as well. ISTEA is the only federal program with significant funding. Coming on the heels

of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles and the reawakening of the need to address economic development in inner cities, ISTEA will surely be looked to as the program with the most potential to effect change.

ISTEA provides local MPOs with a stronger position on transportation decisions than they have ever had before. This precipitates a more equal relationship between state transportation planners and local officials. Given the diversity of local officials' interest and the generation of strong diverse interest groups at the local level, a completely new environment for transportation discussions between state and local authorities may result.

ISTEA and CAAA will undoubtedly precipitate local pressure to restructure MPOs. In many cases, multiple MPOs have sprung up within a common clean-air district. This phenomenon happens primarily in areas in which the clean air district does not engage a real community identity or interest.[1] ISTEA will bring about more pressure for local coalitions to define an MPO membership and operational structure to better represent the interests of individual coalitions. This may force more states to take action to designate regional planning areas and define the rules for operation.

Another good news/bad news aspect of the act is that it probably will become the primary means for government funding for job creation in a struggling economy. There will be great pressure to get moving and use the funds. The Los Angeles crisis will make that scenario even more urgent. At the same time, there will be great opportunity for special interests to block actions and develop their own influence and power. The scenario is a challenging one.

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

Blaine Liner, currently at the Urban Institute, was for many years the Director of the Southern Growth Policies Board. He frequently said he could predict which states and local areas were most likely to produce new cutting-edge programs. They were invariably areas in which a real community of interest could be identified outside the structure of government. The new programs appeared to result from situations in which representatives of many diverse interests (including but not dominated by governmental officials) came together and formed something that they then submitted to the government agencies for approval

and ratification. Liner pointed out that an obvious help in forming a community of interest is a common identity. Thus, local areas that have a regional name or designation (e.g., Tidewater Area) are more likely to form a community of interest than amalgamations of counties or cities (e.g., the five-county metropolitan area of _____).

Dolph Norten, long-time head of the Cleveland Foundation, the Ohio Board of Regents, and the University of Virginia Institute of Government, frequently talked about how communities appear to have almost a "superordinate consciousness" and "biorhythms." He often related how Cleveland was sometimes a "center for action" and at other times "dead as a doornail" without any discernable change in the quality of local leadership. Harlan Cleveland, who is now at the Humphrey Institute in Minneapolis and is former head of the East-West Center and the Maxwell School, subscribes to the notion, as do many other experienced community scholars, that it is the quality of followership rather than leadership that determines what places can do cooperatively and when they can do it (1).

Consequently, shapers of regulations to implement ISTEA should be conscious about the importance of developing a system that encourages partnership formation where the basis for a community of interests exists. Real partnership requires development of a real community of interest, not just a place for political representatives to work out compromises. Studies of places with communities of interest show the importance of communication systems and feedback and a basic level of public support (or public permission). Recent studies, such as the Kettering Foundation report on Citizens and Politics, suggest the folly of developing systems for decisions if the citizens are not "connected" (2).

These considerations are especially important for states that will attempt to define regional planning districts. As discussed earlier, more pressure will result from ISTEA for states to set up designated districts and to set ground rules for participation by subdistrict MPOs where multiple MPOs occur within one clean air attainment area.

All this appears to indicate that the implementing structure of ISTEA and CAAA must be able to respond quickly to places with a real community of interest and also be encouraging to the development of MPOs that represent real places. At the same time it must be able to operate fairly in places that are unorganized, encouraging the development of a real community of interest.

PARTNERSHIP AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING LESSONS

A couple of years ago, the Lincoln Land Institute hosted a series of conferences on consensus building and partnership (3). The following were considered in the discussions.

1. Goals: Citizens participate in community-wide goal setting, an effort that is usually temporary, but sometimes ongoing (e.g., Goals for Dallas).
2. Citizen task forces: Citizens participate in efforts to focus on particular problems and develop solutions (e.g., Minneapolis–St. Paul Citizens League).
3. Key leaders organizations: Top leaders, usually corporate chief executive officers, determine priorities and work for their accomplishment (e.g., Cleveland Tomorrow or Chicago United).
4. Coalition of organizations: Organized special interest groups come together under a common agenda (e.g., the Denver Partnership).
5. Public choice campaigns: A community leadership group focuses on educating the community about a complex issue (e.g., Public Agenda Foundation program in Des Moines and Philadelphia).

A community might employ more than one of these types of efforts concurrently or in sequence. In general, these efforts are focused on one or more of the following critical tasks for effective community problem solving:

1. Reflecting interests. Effective problem solving requires all key interests to come to the table; otherwise, blockages eventually occur.
2. Feedback. Effective community progress depends on a sense of progress and, more often than not, a sense of how the community feels about itself. Reflecting on itself through surveys, dialogue, or both is usually critical to effect change.
3. Involvement. Few long-term constructive changes occur in places without a sense of ownership of the problem and agreement on the solution. The larger the direct involvement, the more likely implementation will occur.
4. Crossing boundaries. Few problems (especially transportation and air quality problems) are confined in formal governmental boundaries. Few real communities correspond with political boundaries. Successful problem solving must transcend political boundaries.

5. Education. If communities have some sort of superordinate consciousness, then education of individual citizens is critical. It is now clear that what citizens learn from each other may be the most important part of setting an environment for problem solving.

6. Framing issues. A major finding of recent studies of citizens' attitudes toward politics (e.g., the Kettering Foundation study of citizens and politics) is the failure of political leadership to frame public issues in the language of the public. All too often the issue is oversimplified to the point that the public regards it as either extreme or trite, or it is expressed in jargon that the public has no interest in following. Success in consensus building requires honest framing of real issues in language that conveys the complexities of the issues to the public. In addition to general public comprehensibility is the need to incorporate the interests of contending parties, so that the framing of the issue promotes bringing the parties together for negotiation. Issue framing is one of the most difficult and critical tasks for successful partnerships and consensus building. As the institute worked through an analysis of processes against the tasks required for effective results, the matrix shown in Figure 1 was developed.

	Reflecting Interests	Feedback	Involvement	Cross Boundaries	Education Working Through	Framing Issues
Goals	X	X-	X	X	X-	-
Citizen Task Force	X	X-	X	X	X-	X
Community Planning	X	-	-	-	-	-
Key Leaders	X	-	-	X	X-	X
Coalition Of Organizations	X	X-	X-	X-	X-	X-
Public Choice Campaign	X	X	X-	X	X	X-

X = Very Effective
X- = Somewhat Effective
- = Not Very Effective

FIGURE 1 Process for community agenda setting.

NIS EXPERIMENTS

NIS is a unique process that was developed by the Kettering Foundation several years ago in response to the challenge of coordinating federalism. It was based on what appeared to work in local problem solving and what appeared to not work in the early experiments of the War on Poverty. NIS includes a high-profile, short-time-scale process (4) in which all the key decision makers and interest group leaders gather together in one place in a series of face-to-face meetings and work through an investment strategy.

Key parts of the NIS concept are as follows:

1. An investment strategy. Program funds are all too frequently applied to relieve the symptoms of a problem. If an effort is made first to define the problems and needs and a resulting set of conditions is agreed on, program monies (both public and private) can then be applied as investments in achieving that set of conditions.

2. A neutral facilitator. The availability of a trusted neutral facilitator has been repeatedly identified as a key to cooperation among diverse interests. Perhaps most important, it resolves the leadership question by enabling the process to be conducted by someone who will not subsequently be a factor in local political contests.

3. Development of negotiating teams. The process basically embraced the concept of Roger Fisher's Single Text Negotiation (5). Single text negotiation starts by pulling individual interests together into group proposals and disparate group proposals into one structure for point-by-point consideration. The process quickly brings a chaotic set of issues into a manageable context.

4. Face-to-face discussions. Studies of implementation [e.g., work by Wildavsky and Pressman (6)] illustrate the low success of programs that require sequential review and approval processes. Having key decision makers work through a set of issues face-to-face at one time makes a discernable difference.

5. Signed agreement. A signed agreement not only makes commitments clear, but provides an opportunity for celebration of achievement. Scholars who study consensus building frequently cite celebration as the most important step in long-term success.

NIS was initiated as an experiment in 1979 in St. Paul, Minnesota; Columbus, Ohio; and Gary, Indiana by the District Five Federal Re-

gional Council. Its record of success has been heralded for several years in all three places. In 1980, the new administration did not want the federal government in an initiating role. The NIS impetus shifted to the states. Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, and others used it in implementing various block grant programs. It is used in many places today in varied forms in community problem solving. However, its design was to enable an effective process to occur within a complicated federal system, a prescription seemingly fitted to the ISTEA/CAAA challenge today.

LESSONS FROM NIS

Studies of NIS and other community problem-solving and consensus-building efforts appear to suggest the following guideposts for a successful implementation procedure for ISTEA and CAAA:

1. Focus on investment, and do so in an understandable and high-profile environment. The greatest problem in the United States today is probably public cynicism. Studies show that cynicism may be justified by processes designed to keep interfering influences out. Too few funding resources are available to do symptom amelioration, and public support margins are too narrow to allow another federal initiative to be regarded as a failure.

2. Temporary third-party intervention is useful. States that have adopted requirements for regional land use planning have typically adopted third-party mediation capacity to accompany it. Discussions about regional cooperation success at the 1992 American Society for Public Administration conference identified third-party facilitation as the most frequently mentioned ingredient of success.

3. Enormous capacity is available to deliver results in the hands of administrators in different agencies and at different levels of government if they work in concert. By the same token, most efforts of administrators at all levels are blunted by countervailing efforts or positions by counterparts. Places or programs where disagreements can be set aside while participants work together on agreements are clearly more successful than those where petty disagreements and misunderstandings cause suspicion and blockage of action.

4. Any process that operates outside hierarchical, bureaucratic norms is extremely difficult to organize or set in motion. Many commu-

nities have been unable to develop partnerships without a push or crisis because of this inertia. A successful process for precipitating partnerships depends on someone assuming the responsibility to initiate a consensus-building procedure. The increasing availability of community problem solving centers across the country will help. Examples such as the Florida Growth Management Conflict Resolution Consortium and the Human Services Division of the Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia show how the development of a program to push facilitated problem solving enhances the initiation of efforts to achieve cross-interest agreements. It is also clear that facilitated agreements offer a unique opportunity to show progress, which in turn improves the environment for continued support and ultimate success.

IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS

The initial design and conclusions of this paper were tested by circulation of a draft to some contemporary scholars in the field and a presentation to the National Transportation Planning Board Conference on ISTEA. The following questions emerged from those reviews:

- How is a community of interest fostered?
- How are existing MPOs examined and evaluated?
- What tools are needed and available for partnerships?
- How are new partners brought in?
- What is the role of leadership?
- What key ingredients make partnerships work?
- How is success gauged?
- How are problems troubleshot?

The following paragraphs are possible answers to those questions.

Fostering a Community of Interest

Various methods can be used to determine if the basis for a community of interests exists. Has there been an effort to form a regional problem-solving program? What boundaries have been used and why? Is there a name for an area that closely corresponds to the clean air attainment area that has been used by the local media? Parker Palmer defines community as a "sustained conversation about things that matter"

with the quality of community directly proportional to the ratio of "odd couples" in the conversation (7). Is there anything there that meets Palmer's definition? If there is, or evidence that it could be, George Gallup and others would suggest that the most important step is to make it "aware of itself." The Gallup model for local polling is a good start (conversations with George Gallup, Sr., 1975–1980, and George Gallup, Jr., 1991). Poll results can show members of a community how the community as a whole thinks about things—the most basic part of the reflective consciousness that marks the development of living tissue into a human being. David Mathews suggests that the most important act of leadership is to "go talk to somebody."

Evaluating Existing MPOs

Some logical guidelines appear to come from successful partnerships. Is the MPO more than a technical assistance body? Who attends the meetings, and do they attend regularly? Have they been secretariats for what people regard as key leadership bodies, such as Cleveland Tomorrow or the Dallas Citizens Council?

Partnership Tools

There is a rapidly developing field of community problem solving. Key institutions are state offices or programs for negotiation, dispute resolution, or problem solving. The Hewlitt Foundation has invested heavily in establishing dispute-resolution and problem-solving centers across the country. A national coalition of public interest groups has formed the Program for Community Problem Solving, which has just published a national resource directory (8). In addition, the National Civic League has developed a helpful tool called the *Civic Index* and provides problem-solving organization assistance to states and communities (9).

Bringing in New Partners

The National Civic League's process for stakeholder analysis is representative of the state of the art for determining who ought to be involved when a community makes important decisions (10).

Role of Leadership

Leadership may be the most discussed, most researched, most written about, and still the least understood concept there is. One thing that all appear to agree on, however, is that leadership forms the agenda; it starts the discussion. If the process is designed well, the discussion will attract the parties that need to be involved. By defining a process that follows the guidelines suggested, the government officials who initiated ISTEA will attract needed leadership. A good start can be made by using the type of stakeholder analysis suggested earlier.

One critical, yet often overlooked, function of leadership is making sure that there is celebration of progress as work starts. Often the media are criticized unfairly for not telling the good news when leaders operate secretly, shun exposure, or avoid stopping and creating the events that let the public know when a critical issue has been resolved or a major breakthrough achieved.

Key Ingredients for Partnership

People involved in various programs for community problem solving around the country seem to concur on most of the following critical pieces for success: good groundwork (interviews, analysis, reflection), effective facilitation (seeking to understand before being understood) (usually best done by a third party), and early agreement, with appropriate celebration of progress.

Gauging Success

Success comes from implementation, and successful implementation requires celebration. A record of celebrations is not a bad indicator of progress.

Troubleshooting

The best allies for ISTEA implementors are probably the state and local problem-solving institutions described earlier. Although many things have developed in communities during the last 2 decades, the most

impressive may be the development of community leadership training programs (from 5 to more than 400 in less than 20 years) and the development of community problem-solving institutes or programs (the directory lists 83), most created during the past 5 years. Some places have linked the community leadership development programs with their problem-solving institutions. Training programs offer an important opportunity to learn about ISTEA, and the problem-solving institutions are a great new resource for fixing trouble spots and learning how to avoid the pitfalls of the local planning process previously in place.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

ISTEA and CAAA are sure to precipitate a major change in regional planning processes in this country. At one end of the scale, they could reinaugurate all the bad examples that eventually caused the demise of the A-95 local planning process: manipulation by power-seeking bureaucrats, exploitation by special interest groups, and disenfranchisement of community interests groups who could not keep up with the jargon and complexity of the process. On the other end of the scale, the acts could cause a major stalemate between powerful community interests (e.g., the roadbuilding, development interest versus the clean air interest). Transportation policy, more than any other factor, has shaped the nation's physical structure and promises to do so for a long time. ISTEA puts more of the full game on the same table, which offers an incredible opportunity for improvement if the game is played by constructive rules. Experiments such as NIS and those of Florida and Georgia in regional land use planning suggest the power of the problem-solving paradigm. The degree to which implementing rules are designed to enhance processes similar to NIS may be the degree to which this new opportunity may be the turning point in instituting planning in America that works.

NOTE

1. There are numerous examples of where smaller MPOs have operated within the boundaries of a larger MPO. Current conversations between public officials in Lorain County, Ohio, are exemplary. Conversations are focused on whether the county should rejuvenate its Regional Planning Commission

or seek a strengthened position in the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency.

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