

# TOMORROW'S PEOPLE:

## ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Beverly A. Harper, Portfolio Associates, Inc.

Transportation agencies must implement these three basic concepts if the goal of effective citizen participation is to be achieved: (a) There must be viable and achievable objectives for citizens, (b) specific and visible criteria for the selection of citizens are necessary and must be related to the task objective, and (c) agency personnel must start to build credibility. A citizens panel convened to assist in a study for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation serves as a model of effective participation. The development and operations of this panel provide proper procedures for implementing the basic concepts. This panel assisted with the development of a manual to be used by agency personnel to achieve effective citizen participation. The importance of agency personnel attitudes toward citizen participation is demonstrated in a characterization of them as yesterday, today, and tomorrow people.

•IN reviewing the process of successful citizen participation, one inevitably finds certain basic concepts underlying such success. I will explore the successful interaction between a group of citizens working with consultants from Portfolio Associates, Inc., and Ueland and Junker, Architects and Planners, and show how together they developed a manual for achieving effective citizen participation in Pennsylvania. The project was successful because the manual was produced with substantial citizen input.

In 1973, Portfolio Associates, Inc., was awarded a contract by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to research and produce a citizen participation manual for use by agency personnel. The manual details what citizens might do at specific points throughout the transportation planning and development process in Pennsylvania. A project report outlines the process used to develop the manual and the research findings (1).

Some of the five major parts of the study provide a sound rationale for citizen participation to those who think it is not needed. For those who think that citizen participation cannot work, the process that was developed for convening and working with the citizen panel serves as a model for achieving citizen participation by using three basic concepts.

What was involved in the five major parts of the study is discussed below.

1. A long time was spent at the beginning of this study trying to understand what aspects of the process would involve citizen participation. It was decided that citizens would be involved in the Pennsylvania DOT transportation planning and development process from system planning to construction.

Problems in using citizen participation occur because in a bureaucratic structure, departmentalization frequently minimizes effective communication. This results because, although department heads broadly know their areas of responsibility, they are often in doubt about the specific tasks of other departments and how this work affects the operational continuity of their tasks.

2. A national survey was conducted to ascertain those techniques of citizen participation that had proved effective, i.e., whether or not there was substantial agreement in terms of outcome on the part of all participants. The dollar value of projects stopped because of citizen resistance in the last 5 years was also part of the survey.

Based on responses from 43 states, there were approximately 111 projects terminated at total project cost of \$4 billion. Each state had an average of two to three projects stopped at a cost of \$107 million/state. In my judgment these figures offer a most effective argument for citizen participation.

3. Four case studies on citizen participation in transportation planning within Pennsylvania and three national cases, in California, West Virginia, and Boston, were conducted and reported on. In all cases, at least four people representing various points of view on each project were interviewed.

4. Approximately 120 techniques were reviewed for possible applicability to a transportation planning process that would involve citizens. Forty were selected for presentation in this manual.

5. A statewide citizen's panel was convened to assist us, the consultants, in the development of the manual.

The manual diagrams and describes specific points in the five-phase Pennsylvania DOT process at which citizens might be involved. Nine types of tasks that citizens may be asked to do are also presented. These include having citizens assist in the notification process, using informal advisory groups (existing or newly formed), and formally constituting a negotiation group to resolve specific conflicts among groups within an impacted community.

Forty techniques for involving and working with citizens are described and grouped into four categories: information, issue clarification, problem solving, and group process. Since communications problems are important for agencies to solve, emphasis was placed on information techniques.

Finally, a process is presented for selecting the appropriate techniques given a specific situation. The process requires an analysis of the project and communities to be impacted. Three basic concepts emerged when the process developed for involving a group of citizens was reviewed. A discussion of each follows.

## NEED FOR A VIABLE AND ACHIEVABLE OBJECTIVE

There must be a viable and achievable objective for citizens participating in the transportation planning and development process. Much thought must be given to what citizens are asked to do so that their time is not wasted. Their time is wasted when (a) they come to a meeting, are handed papers, and asked to vote on certain items, (b) they are asked to develop alternatives and know that there is only one solution the local politician will accept, and (c) the first hour and a half of a public meeting at which the citizen statement is to be made is occupied by technical jargon and maps no one understands or can see.

If citizens are asked for advice they must be convinced that such advice will be taken into consideration. An aspect of real involvement is real communication. Citizens must believe that their experiences and views are worth something in the transportation planning and development process. They can only believe this if the people asking them to participate demonstrate this. However, without citizen participation, transportation facilities can still be built. The history of transportation planning and development in this country clearly demonstrates this. When our national transportation policy involved waterways and railroads, how many citizen groups were a part of the decision-making process? In the early twentieth century when public work departments started building roads for cars, how many automobile owners were contacted for their input? When, in 1956, the Highway Revenue Act became a reality, were citizen views heard (2)?

An achievable objective is to demonstrate to citizens that their participation was effective, meaningful, and worthwhile and that it made a difference. However, citizens may be involved in meaningless participation when they attend a meeting like that of the citizen advisory committee (CAC). An agenda of such a meeting follows:

1. Introductions,
2. Welcome by the deputy secretary of the state department of transportation,
3. A film on the history of public participation in transportation planning,
4. Rules and regulations governing the CAC,
5. A speech by the immediate past president of CAC on citizen responsibility,
6. Meeting schedule for the coming year, and
7. Questions and answers.

An example of a participatory meeting agenda would have a structure that allows citizens to assume specific responsibilities in the public notification process for a given geographic area. A group could be convened for a 1 or 2-year term to assist the state department of transportation in ensuring that communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals receive information about impending public meetings, public hearings, and various project or system plan reviews. This group could be trained to assist organizations or individuals in understanding the information or in the preparation of public statements.

A typical meeting agenda of the CAC on communications for area A that demonstrates meaningful participation would be structured as follows:

1. Introductions;
2. Review of two-page background materials (received previously by the group by mail) including, perhaps, the agenda, a brief synopsis of the history of public participation, and statements by the deputy secretary and the immediate past president of CAC;
3. Determination and description of the formal and informal communications channels that exist in the target area;
4. Identification of the groups, institutions, and key individuals in the target area;
5. Assignment of responsibilities for information dissemination (a) to conduct an informal survey to determine the names and contact people for all community organizations in the area or (b) to find out the public programming policies of local media and how much technical assistance is available to community groups or individuals; and
6. Development of timetables and meeting schedules.

The differences between these two meeting agendas are obvious. At the end of their terms, each participant in the CAC on communications will have learned valuable communications information that can be used in many other projects in which every community organization in a given geographic area receives and understands information about a transportation project.

The meetings with the Pennsylvania DOT citizens panel further demonstrate that there are projects for citizens to work on, even at the planning stages of transportation development. These meetings coincided with the consultants' development of the manual. The first of four sessions was planned as an introductory meeting for a panel, the consultants, and Pennsylvania DOT personnel. It provided a review of project objectives, a discussion of the consultants' expectations for the citizen panel, and the citizens' expectations of the study. Information was also available about how the panel was selected.

At this first meeting, people talked about their experiences, their feelings, and their distrust of Pennsylvania DOT and of other government agencies and elected officials. Ironically, agencies and politicians reinforce this distrust when they set up mechanisms to deal almost exclusively with each other.

Although many of the citizens had been actively involved in transportation projects, this was the first face-to-face opportunity they had to let Pennsylvania DOT administrators know how they felt. This necessary venting process served as a test of the department's public image and recurred at intervals during the succeeding sessions. This process should be viewed, by agency personnel, as valuable feedback and as an opportunity to counter negative impressions or incorrect information. This airing of views often happens when any group meets for the first time. The amount of time consumed by this activity is directly related to the importance the group attaches to its primary objective.

At the second meeting with the panel, the citizen entry points into the Pennsylvania DOT planning process were discussed. Citizens had an opportunity to review, in advance of the meeting, the various citizen entry points in Pennsylvania DOT's action plan and those recommended by the consultants.

The objective of the third meeting was to recommend specific techniques for involving citizens throughout the transportation planning and development process. In the past and in a number of agencies today, citizen participation in the form of a public hearing is announced in a small box often on the obituary page of a local newspaper. The citizen panel had many constructive comments and suggestions for improved techniques.

All of the recommendations and observations of the citizens were considered when the consultants produced the draft manual and report. These drafts were 400 pages each; as a result, one was not inspired to read them entirely.

The citizens panel was given 6 weeks to read this material. Much to the surprise of Pennsylvania DOT personnel, when the citizens met for the fourth and final meeting all had read most of the documents. In addition, they had made extensive comments or specific recommendations. Generally, the changes suggested by the citizens involved simplifying the organization and structure of the manual. They also felt that it should be as jargon free as possible. As the result of citizen input radio was used instead of billboards to inform the community.

Of course, the fact that the citizens were available to discuss all aspects of the manual's development from their perspective served as an invaluable resource and sounding board. The consultants received a tremendous vote of confidence from the citizens. They trusted that the suggestions made at this final meeting would be incorporated into the final report and manual. They did not have to see the revisions.

In retrospect, I think the citizens became involved and stayed involved in this project because

1. They felt that they had something to contribute;
2. They saw this as an opportunity to constructively present their views and recommendations;
3. They thought the committee was something important and prestigious and, therefore, were flattered; and
4. They trusted that their views would be considered.

## NEED FOR CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF CITIZENS

Specific and visible criteria for the selection of citizens are necessary and must be related to the task objective. Transportation officials must be willing to make public the process and selection criteria for citizen participants. Once the process and criteria are made public, the criteria will be forced to become more specific. For example, it was never valid to have one black citizen as a representative for minorities, although many agencies believed it was. As soon as this general criterion is made public, questions are asked about the person's socioeconomic background, education, residential area, and job. The answers to these questions force us to consider a more definite set of criteria.

The process developed for the selection of the citizens panel for the Pennsylvania DOT study is as follows:

1. Identification of a definite job to be done,
2. Development of general and specific criteria for the selection of individuals,
3. Submission of names by Pennsylvania DOT and the consultants, and
4. Negotiation of the final group with decision makers.

(The specific job to be done has been discussed in the first concept.)

The first general criterion for selecting the citizens panel was that each citizen had had some experience with a transportation planning or development project. This was

necessary because project time was too limited to allow the panel to be educated about Pennsylvania DOT processes or the concept of citizen participation in transportation planning. The second general criterion was that each person had to be able to constructively contribute to the work of the group.

To provide broad-based experiences and input to the manual, at least one citizen was identified for each of the following categories:

1. Resident of Philadelphia or Pittsburgh,
2. Resident of a nonmajor city in Pennsylvania, and
3. Elected government official.

To ensure that participants had a wide range of community experiences, individuals were selected from at least three types of community groups.

Finally, it was felt that technical expertise was needed on the panel to make information readily available on issues concerning the citizens. This requirement was satisfied by requesting that someone with legal experience within Pennsylvania DOT and a lawyer outside of Pennsylvania DOT serve in addition to a department cost accountant and someone with department construction or engineering highway design experience. Questions of race, sex, and socioeconomic level were discussed as a secondary set of criteria to ensure that the panel was balanced. The organized panel contained 21 persons. All participants generally accepted that the criteria were valid and consistent.

Following are two examples in which established criteria fit specific tasks assigned to participants:

1. If the group were to act as a communications channel with a given community, a general criterion would have been active (having participated in more than 10 community activities in the past 2 years) people who lived within that community.
2. If the group were to help develop alternatives, one general criterion would have been people who had lived in the affected community for at least 1 year (they would not necessarily have to have been involved in community activities).

Again, the problem of who should participate is simplified if one specifically describes the task, develops the process and criteria for citizen selection, and, finally, makes the process and criteria for selection public.

Every panel or group is composed of people with personalities and involvements. When people are selected, it is important that their personalities be matched to appropriate and compatible tasks. This is a crucial factor in the first stages of serious citizen participation organization. To maximize effectiveness, selectivity and discrimination must be given priority.

For such groups, people are needed who (a) can solve the problems already created, (b) are not intimidated by bureaucratic structures, (c) can offer constructive and diplomatic guidance, and (d) can recognize when a task is impossible and believably state the reasons for its impossibility. There are such people; I have worked with them on the Pennsylvania DOT and other projects. These are successful men and women, who, through determination, have overcome the enormous obstacles in contemporary society.

When a specific job is identified for citizens and their selection is based on their compatibility with the task, the remaining aspect is the manner in which agency personnel relate to the citizens collectively and as individuals.

## NEED FOR AGENCY PERSONNEL TO BUILD CREDIBILITY

If citizen participation is to become a reality, agency personnel must start building credibility. Several ways of building credibility are (a) to provide enough time for citizens to talk, (b) to let citizens know that you are listening to them, and (c) to openly discuss agency constraints. The individual representing a transportation agency must

be able to react honestly to situations as they arise.

Transportation planning agencies seem to be so involved with strategies, simulations, manuals, and red tape that things such as listening, speaking simply, or allowing citizens time to respond are forgotten.

In the last few years, there has been much research, conducted mainly by large consulting firms or institutions, to find viable solutions to old problems, specifically, how to get citizens to participate or, more realistically, how to get citizens to accept the decisions that planners have made. Planning agencies must start working with citizens on projects that are not doomed from the outset. They should work with ordinary citizens, not planners or educational theorists but those whose losses have been greatest because until now they have not been able to contribute to the decision-making process.

No matter how participatory or democratic the process, a group still needs a leader. This person may represent the citizen or a specific agency. It must be someone who can call for a vote, effectively manage a meeting, and direct setups and follow-ups. Agency personnel who are charged with implementing citizen participation should know the agency and its constraints. They should also not be afraid to speak honestly and openly; most importantly, they should provide a forceful but diplomatic image.

Portfolio Associates, Inc., provided for each session of the citizen panel to be evaluated individually by the citizens. The evaluations determined how each person viewed the meeting and estimated how many people they felt would agree with their panel's analysis. The tabulated results of each evaluation were included with the summary of the meeting. (In this type of evaluation, some individuals will admit they are obstructionists.)

Doing this or any type of immediate evaluation is risky; however, it is necessary if we are to learn from our failures and take pride in our successes.

The only reservation that citizens had was that they did not believe that Pennsylvania DOT would follow through and involve citizens at all of the recommended points.

## OBSERVATIONS

In view of current staffing, operations, and attitudes, it does not seem feasible and reasonable to expect that Pennsylvania DOT will involve citizens at all or even most of the recommended points in their planning and development process. However, whatever Pennsylvania DOT does in terms of involving citizens will be well worth the effort that was expended to develop a document of this scope and magnitude. If the department can deal effectively with its own internal problems, this effort has provided some guidelines for getting citizens realistically involved in the planning and development processes.

In this 13-month study, the citizens panel was one element. It was critical, rewarding, and frustrating. It also demonstrates, operationally, that a group of citizens are people with feelings, concerns, valuable experiences, and valuable perceptions.

Based on research findings and work with the panel, additional recommendations were made. They include

1. Establishment and dissemination of policies to govern the implementation of citizen participation,
2. Production of a citizens guide,
3. Establishment of a relationship with state and local elected officials,
4. Earlier identification of impacted communities,
5. Training in citizen participation for agency personnel,
6. Funding of citizen participation, and
7. Legislation to help achieve effective citizen participation.

A detailed report of research findings and a discussion of these recommendations are presented in the project report.

## CONCLUSIONS

I would like to characterize some basic attitudes that transportation agencies have about citizen participation. Perhaps it will help each of us admit what we must do if we are to achieve effective citizen participation. First are the yesterday people, the majority, who think that we did not and do not need citizen participation. They are the obstructionists and staunchly support the status quo. We must begin to ask them, How could yesterday have profited with citizen participation?

Second, there is a large group of today people who say that citizen participation does not work. They, of course, have more than enough evidence to support this position. One then questions, Can today profit from citizen participation? Being the realist, I must admit that some projects can and some cannot. Today, we have to separate those projects. We have to separate those projects in which citizen participation will be an asset and those projects in which it will be a liability. The liability projects are those in which the decisions have already been made.

Third, there are the tomorrow people, who are willing to try almost anything because they believe that tomorrow will be better because of it. I admit to being a tomorrow person, despite today's failures. I feel that today's successes will perpetuate themselves. By tomorrow we will know what to do right because we will have a growing list of successes as examples and failures as learning tools.

## REFERENCES

1. Development and Testing of a Model for Effective Community Participation in Transportation Planning. Bureau of Advance Planning, Pennsylvania DOT, Harrisburg, manual and report.
2. H. Mertins, Jr. National Transportation Policy in Transition. D.C. Heath Co., Mass., 1972.

## DISCUSSION

Maurice Laub

My reaction to this paper is influenced by the following:

1. I have long been a member of a regional citizens' transportation committee that has always considered citizens' involvement in transportation planning and development as both valuable and necessary.
2. I was an active member of the Pennsylvania DOT citizen review panel and participated in three of the four working meetings that were held.
3. I am a graduate civil engineer engaged in building construction, and am, therefore, conversant with the technical aspects of transportation planning and construction, and have a working knowledge of budgeting and cost factors.

Initially, this paper points out a condition that has existed for too many years: people who think we do not need citizen participation and those who think it cannot work. The reference is to the authorities and professional engineers in the transportation field who have ignored (or wished to ignore) the citizen's desire to participate. This attitude has always been so prevalent that it has roused suspicion and antagonism on the part of the citizen. No professional group should consider that they, and they alone, can properly plan for the needs of the people. There has been too much faulty planning that has resulted from such thinking in the past.

Harper also points out that in 43 states responding to a national survey 111 projects involving a cost of \$4 billion were stopped because of citizen resistance. I completely

agree with her conclusion that this makes a strong argument for citizen participation. If the citizens had been brought into the planning process, if their help had been solicited, and if they had been informed with accurate data and had been given an opportunity to influence the final result, many of these projects could have been completed.

In considering the case studies, one must question the adequacy of so few as four interviews producing enough information to draw definite conclusions about the success of the citizen participation process. Undoubtedly there were many different viewpoints expressed in these matters, and a broader consensus of opinion seems warranted.

I agree that, as discussed in the first concept, citizen involvement must not be a window dressing or token effort used to satisfy certain criteria but not used to study need or to select the best route, choice of roadway design, access and egress, and other important elements. Candor and accuracy of information are quite important. The citizen must feel that he or she is a planning team member, privy to all of the data available and free to make suggestions, recommendations, and comments that will be listened to and considered seriously at every stage of development and implementation. That transportation facilities could still be built even if we did not have citizen participation was the pattern in the past and is irrelevant because conditions have changed radically and the problems of traffic movement are much greater and more complex than they were previously. In addition, the impacts are significantly different.

In the section about choice of agenda for meetings, it seems that these citizen meetings are suggested to be structured, regulated meetings in which Pennsylvania DOT steers the activity. This is certainly in order for a meeting in which Pennsylvania DOT is presenting information or outlining timetables for advancing projects through the various phases of study, design, and final implementation. However, there must also be other meetings, perhaps sponsored by Pennsylvania DOT, at which Pennsylvania DOT personnel act as resource people and at which open discussion and debate among the citizens will lead to resolution of differences and to constructive action on controversial questions. Did it not occur to Harper that a major reason for involvement in this program was that citizens want the program to succeed and that they know best what elements are most likely to be effective as far as they are concerned?

In the second concept, it seems there is an intent to choose citizens for involvement in the planning process and to assign specific tasks to them. Where civic associations and other associations representing specific areas are in existence, to choose representatives from their membership is perfectly all right, but how about the people not represented by groups? Are they to be ignored? Every citizen affected by the impact of a highway or transportation facility should be free to participate in some way in discussion of how he or she, or his or her well-being, will be affected and to express the desire for or position against a particular plan. The role of citizen involvement should not be expanded or limited at the whim of any individual or group, such as seems to be implied.

In addressing credibility of agencies, in the third concept, Harper might have made the point that great antagonism toward Pennsylvania DOT exists because of past experiences in which the people involved were given incomplete information, promised results that never materialized (not necessarily through any fault of Pennsylvania DOT although the citizens were unaware of this), or even promised serious consideration of their wishes. Citizen input was seemingly ignored because of the chosen course of action, and there was no explanation to indicate that, in fact, proper consideration was given to their position but finally discarded for some valid reason. Communication has been seriously deficient. Candor, tact, accountability, and sharing of information should be basic requisites in the two-way relationship between the people and the agency. It is unfortunate that Harper has negative feelings about the Pennsylvania DOT program of involving citizens in the planning process. I think that the agency must follow through with a properly developed program that shows sincere intent and that will ultimately result in better planning, quick acceptance of plans jointly developed, and a great saving in time and money both in the planning and in the implementation phase of such planning.

In conclusion, I would like to make two observations.

1. Although this paper is based on a specific program of Pennsylvania DOT, the subject matter could easily apply to almost any state.

2. What was accomplished by this experiment may not be a perfect document or line of action. I know it will fall quite short of what I would like to see, but it is an important beginning in the change that will eventually produce more satisfactory results than were achieved in the past.

## DISCUSSION

Louis E. Keefer, Bureau of Advance Planning, Pennsylvania DOT

I would like to report on the status of the project on which the paper is based. The subject is one of two reports. The other is the project final report, which describes the whole research task, and is published separately and self-contained. Although the reports have been accepted by Pennsylvania DOT, they represent recommended procedures not yet necessarily endorsed by the department or by the Federal Highway Administration.

Pennsylvania DOT is currently assembling reactions to the manual from department field and central office staff who would be expected to implement the described citizen participation techniques. We are asking for suggested pilot applications, both at systems planning and project planning levels, where the various techniques can be used for testing purposes. We expect to start testing these techniques this coming spring.

I found the first phase of this research an exciting and innovative experience. Jack Kinstlinger and I were both active participants, and, I hope, were generally helpful to the consultants. We think that Pennsylvania DOT field people will have considerable difficulty in digesting the complex 40 techniques presented in the manual. They must, of course, read and understand the entire manual, and then they choose the best technique for each particular exercise. I think this will call for more sophistication than these field people presently possess.

Second, I am not sure that Pennsylvania DOT administrators have yet faced up to the amount of personnel and money that a full application of the manual's techniques would call for. Thus, the consultants are probably recommending not only a too-sophisticated methodology but one that may go unsupported administratively.

At the same time, Harper was absolutely correct in outlining what a citizen participation program should entail. It is a Pennsylvania DOT problem if the personnel cannot immediately do the kind of job called for.

However, I think our present program is fairly good. We are, for example, spending some \$30,000 to \$40,000 in our state college transportation study exclusively for citizen participation activities. This is a highly innovative experiment, which I hope will be reported on next year.

Pennsylvania DOT could routinely do so much more! We have in a 20,000-person department exactly 2 community liaison planners, our title for citizen participation experts. One handles about 15 citizen advisory committees on urban transportation studies and other citizen participation activities on system planning. The other handles the postsystem planning activities related to the highway program only. Although there are a great many more Pennsylvania DOT people working in citizen participation activities at all levels, their efforts are largely incidental to the principal tasks on which their civil service classifications are based. This is hardly adequate.

Pennsylvania DOT is fortunately in the process of establishing community liaison planner positions in each of our 11 district engineering offices, and I am hopeful that they will have the necessary technical assistance they need.

In particular, I would like to comment on three points in Harper's paper.

1. I am not sure that Pennsylvania DOT personnel were surprised that most of the citizens advisory panel had read all of the extensive reports provided them because this was a select panel, chosen for the high level of interest expected to be shown. I will admit however, that I would certainly be surprised if anywhere near most of the 500 citizens we have on our transportation study advisory committees read all of the materials we send them. Half the time, they do not come to meetings at all. Probably our agendas are unexciting, just as in the persuasive example Harper outlined. My point is that communication must be two-way, and it is not automatically the bureaucracy that is to blame.

2. Harper also makes a point of building agency credibility, noting that agency personnel charged with implementing citizen participation must not be afraid to speak honestly and openly. That is a good idea; however, it is often fraught with difficulties such as contradicting a governor, a secretary of transportation, or some state legislator or local elected official. Total honesty is probably impossible for any agency representative who wishes to keep an agency job. This practical difficulty in maintaining complete candor is perhaps the strongest argument I can cite to support agency retention of advocate planners. How can an agency build credibility outside the entire political structure in which it exists?

3. I think that Harper's terminology of yesterday, today, and tomorrow people is apt. Because of many things happening in the world, there are more tomorrow people in transportation circles than ever before. Maybe this is because we are attracting younger, brighter people. I know that at Pennsylvania DOT there is growing recognition of the need for meaningful citizen participation, and I think that recognition is now generally shared by most competent transportation agencies. The fact that there is now a TRB Committee on Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning that is vigorous makes for considerable optimism.