

# Transit Advisory Office: An Approach to Technical Assistance in a Decentralized Environment

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, in Los Angeles County, transportation planning has taken place at the regional or subregional level. This situation was dramatically changed in July 1982 when the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) began allocating transit funds directly to cities as a result of a 1/2 cent increase in the county sales tax for public transit. Because responsibilities for transportation planning in the Los Angeles area had been centralized, there was little transportation planning expertise at the local level. To assist cities in transportation planning, the LACTC established the Transit Advisory Office. An approach to technical assistance developed by the LACTC during the first year of a 2-year grant funded by UMTA's Office of Service and Management Demonstrations is outlined. In the initial year of the program, the LACTC found that the highest demand was for the services of information provider and impartial mediator or facilitator. Major problems encountered included lack of communication between elected officials and city staff, a tendency toward overly ambitious projects, and a general apathy toward transit in some cities.

In July 1982 the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) began collection and distribution of a countywide 1/2 cent sales tax for transit. The LACTC returns 25 percent of the proceeds of this tax to the 83 cities and to county unincorporated areas for local transit improvements. The broad discretion that localities have in using these tax revenues has led to a shift in transit planning responsibilities from regional and subregional government to the local level. As a result of this shift, the LACTC perceived a need for increased technical assistance with transportation planning to local governments. An approach developed by the LACTC for providing technical assistance to local jurisdictions in this newly decentralized local planning environment is outlined. Although the LACTC approach has some similarities to technical assistance efforts developed by other regional planning agencies or metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the LACTC has developed a unique blend of elements that are believed to have particular relevance to increasingly decentralized and independent city environments.

## LACTC AND THE LOS ANGELES ENVIRONMENT

### LACTC

The LACTC was created by the California state legislature in 1976 as a centralized policy agency repre-

senting the existing political structure in the county. Before LACTC's existence, various local agencies held closely guarded pockets of authority and often competed against each other for state and federal financial support. The California state legislature sought to solve this problem by vesting the LACTC--a central agency with an appointed board of elected officials representing all areas in the county--with control of state and federal transportation funds for Los Angeles County.

### Los Angeles Area

One of the key aspects of transportation planning for Los Angeles County is the diversity of the area. The Los Angeles area is composed of 83 cities interspersed with numerous pockets of county unincorporated areas. Populations in the 84 jurisdictions (the cities plus the County of Los Angeles) range from 3,071,120 in the city of Los Angeles down to a total population of 89 in the city of Vernon. More than 1 million people reside in the unincorporated areas. A wide variety of local geographic and demographic characteristics is represented in the county; communities are situated in hillside and coastal areas as well as in the low-density semi-desert northern and eastern areas of the county.

With the exception of the city of Los Angeles, which is governed by the council and mayor system, all Los Angeles County cities operate under the council and manager form of government. Eighteen of the cities are "contract" cities; that is, they contract out major city services such as police, fire, and public works to county agencies or private firms. Each city and unincorporated area in the county is--or is of the opinion that it is--unique. This perceived uniqueness is reflected in the transportation needs and problems of the local jurisdictions.

### Sales Tax for Transit

Among other broad allocation authorities for public transportation, the LACTC's legislative mandate included authority to seek a local sales or gasoline tax increase to finance public transit projects. After more than 2 years of staff-level development, the LACTC placed a 1/2 percent sales tax, Proposition A, on the November 1980 general election ballot, where it obtained 54 percent voter approval. After legal challenges to the constitutionality of the tax were settled, collection of the sales tax began in July 1982.

The tax has three basic components. There is a change in the funding mix for two of the components after 3 years.

1. Twenty-five percent of revenues ("local return") is returned to local jurisdictions as a permanent part of the program.

2. Operating subsidy, to reduce bus fares and cover bus system deficits, remains in effect for 3 years.

3. The rail program receives all remaining funds during the first 3 years. After the initial 3-year period, rail is guaranteed a minimum of 35 percent, and 40 percent of the fund becomes discretionary.

The relationship among these components is shown in Figure 1.

#### Local Institutional Structure

During the past 30 years, public transit planning and decision making in the Los Angeles area have become centered in a few large agencies. The major actors include

1. Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD), the operator of 86 percent of the transit service in Los Angeles County, was created in 1965 to absorb many small private transit operators. The agency has been left relatively free to make its own service deployment decisions within the framework of available funding. Because of the regional nature of most SCRTD bus lines, city involvement in transit planning has been limited to sporadic review of SCRTD plans by city management.

2. Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the officially designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) in the Southern California area. The agency was created in 1965 for the purpose of undertaking comprehensive regional planning in the six-county region. SCAG has had regional responsibilities for transportation planning since

1971. The agency also maintains expertise in long-range transportation planning. Local involvement in transit planning has been minimal, even though most cities are members of SCAG. This is due, in large part, to the longer-range, regional planning perspective of the agency.

3. The State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) became an actor in public transit in 1971 with the creation of a state sales tax subsidy for public transit. The agency's exposure to cities has been limited to those cities receiving state subsidies for bus operations.

4. Eight of the 83 cities in Los Angeles County maintain municipal fixed-route transit services. Before the passage of Proposition A, these eight local jurisdictions were the only cities directly involved in transportation planning. When necessary, the remaining 75 cities generally allocated transportation planning responsibilities to a member of the city planning or traffic engineering staff.

#### Change in Planning Responsibilities

The passage of Proposition A shifted a considerable portion of planning responsibilities to the local level in Los Angeles County. Some of the precepts of "new federalism," prevail because money is returned directly to local governments. These local jurisdictions are then given broad discretion in local transportation decisions. However, as indicated earlier, transportation expertise in Los Angeles County has traditionally been centered in a few large agencies and in the eight cities with municipal transit systems. This indicated a need for transit assistance at the local level, although the form that technical assistance would take was, as yet, undetermined.

#### APPROACHES TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

##### Existing Approaches

The LACTC recognized that the influx of new money combined with the lack of local transit expertise would result in a need for technical assistance. The question was what approach would be most effective. The technical assistance staff could

1. Provide tools (models, computer programs) that could be used by relatively expert groups of planners to analyze or evaluate a set of options. SCAG provides some of these functions in Los Angeles County.

2. Research available information on transit options and present it to clients in a concise, easily understandable format. This might also include some training in data collection and analysis.

3. Work alongside city staff on a temporary basis to provide a particular type of expertise or to absorb temporary work overflow. This might also include supplying project ideas to cities without the incentive or expertise to develop their own.

4. Act as an impartial third party, ironing out differences among city staff departments or between cities.

Each of these approaches has been implemented, to some degree, in other areas or agencies. SCAG, because of its role in regional long-term planning and research, frequently provides census information and transportation modeling expertise to local communities. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the San Francisco Bay Area (1) has implemented a rent-a-planner concept, providing planners

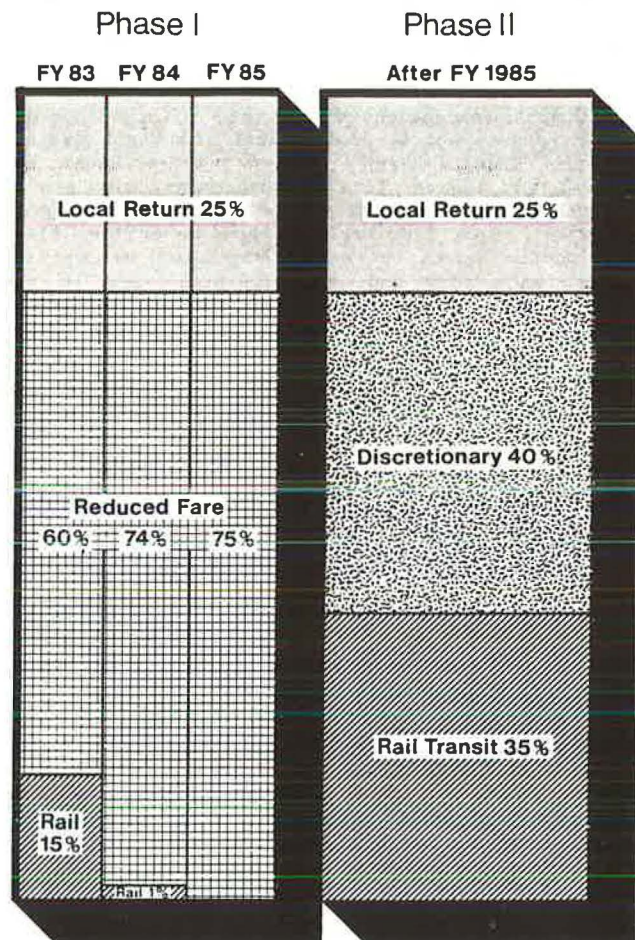


FIGURE 1 Proposition A transit development program.



at no charge to cities with a specific project to implement. Technical assistance at the federal level has, so far, focused on providing handbooks, training planners, and assisting in the development of demonstration projects.

Working with the UMTA Office of Service and Management Demonstrations, the LACTC developed an approach to technical assistance that incorporates a number of features that make it particularly responsive to the decentralized environment in Los Angeles. This approach included extensive use of the short-range planning guidelines developed for UMTA by the Urban Institute (2). These documents provide a ready source of transit options and innovations; they not only describe what projects other cities have undertaken but also identify a step-by-step planning process.

#### Development of the LACTC Technical Assistance Approach

In developing the approach for local technical assistance, the LACTC had to consider a number of factors including

1. A number of other agencies were gearing up to do technical assistance. SCAG has well-developed staff skills in transportation modeling and demand forecasting. These could be tapped as necessary. Similarly, SCTR has extensive data on transit ridership by line segment. The agency offers sketch service assessments on a no-cost basis, and does detailed route analysis and needs studies on a fee-for-service basis. What would be the most efficient use of these regional resources that would allow other agencies to exercise their areas of expertise?
2. Private consultants viewed the LACTC technical assistance effort as potentially in conflict with their services. How could the perceived competition be avoided?
3. Only two planners were budgeted in the grant for technical assistance. How could they best be deployed to most efficiently meet the technical assistance needs of 83 cities and a large unincorporated area?

These issues are not unique to Los Angeles County but occur in most areas where there are many actors in decision making, an active consultant population, and limited resources for providing planning assistance. The LACTC technical assistance office case may, therefore, be instructive for other areas in terms of approach and experiences.

#### TYPES OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE TRANSIT ADVISORY OFFICE

The tasks performed by the Transit Advisory Office were designed to be flexible and responsive to the demands of cities. As expected, during the first year, considerable time was devoted to orienting cities to transit and methods for transit needs assessment. Very little traditional "technical" transit work was performed for cities possibly because, as discussed earlier, the initial level of transit knowledge and experience among cities was so low. As detailed hereafter, primary tasks during the initial year of the program centered around orienting cities to transit in general, assisting city staffs with consultants, and providing information on alternatives analysis, capital procurement, and program evaluation.

#### City Orientation to Transit

The Transit Advisory Office initially embarked on a course of orientation, visiting all Los Angeles County jurisdictions to gain firsthand information from city managers and administrators, mayors, or the designated Proposition A staff person to ascertain the level of assistance needed. These meetings specifically included a discussion of the local return program, present and future uses of the monies, and the city's perception of the community's transit needs. Additionally, the planners explained why the office had been established and the services it could perform at no cost to the cities.

#### Newsletter

As part of the effort to keep cities informed about transit in the county, state, and nation, a newsletter, "Transit Tips" was begun that highlighted Proposition A projects, innovative transit concepts, and available resource material. In addition, condensations of case studies from the Urban Institute's planning handbook were featured (2). The newsletter evolved from the discovery that cities could benefit from receiving regular written material on program administration, project eligibility, and the experience of other cities.

#### Assistance with Requests for Proposal

With the influx of transportation monies to the cities due to the passage of Proposition A, cities for the first time have great control of the shaping of local transit services. However, because many cities historically were not oriented toward mass transportation, they were unsure about how to go about spending their Proposition A monies wisely.

The Transit Advisory Office was called on to develop requests for proposal (RFPs) for individual cities or groups of cities interested in ascertaining the unmet transit needs of residents. Office planners would tailor the RFP according to the needs of the city or cities involved. The RFP would note specific areas that had to be addressed by the consultant including intracommunity, intercommunity, and regional transportation needs as well as a complete financial analysis of each alternative recommendation.

Because most cities requesting this type of assistance had little or no knowledge of local needs, city councils used the study's final recommendations as justification for future action. Without the RFP as justification, the office found that councils were wary of implementing a program and thus spending money. Providing this assistance has afforded an excellent opportunity for the technical assistance staff to become involved at the local level.

#### Proposition A Information

Through the close initial contact the Transit Advisory Office staff had with each city, the planners became a source of administrative information on the Proposition A program including project eligibility, interpretation of guidelines, and project submittal procedures.

#### Incidental Assistance

Many tasks performed by the Transit Advisory Office could best be described as "incidental assistance." This includes providing such items as

- Inventories of paratransit operators for communities initiating paratransit service;
- Lists of vehicle manufacturers;
- List of bus shelter manufacturers (it is speculated that the popularity of this project arose from the local need to undertake a small, yet visible project);
- Service analysis of existing transit operations; and
- Operator evaluation checklist to be used by a city when reviewing the proposals of potential contract service providers.

#### EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE LEVEL OF INFORMATION NEEDED

The Transit Advisory Office provides technical assistance with emphasis on assistance; the level of technicality is tailored to the city's specific need or to the specific project design. The need for this type of flexibility in the provision of technical assistance and information dissemination is documented in an analysis of the subject performed by the U.S. Department of Transportation (3).

The report identifies and defines three functional information user levels. The first of these user levels is the policy user group, including top-level administrators and elected officials. This policy-level information user group requires overview publications, introductory in nature, designed to aid in gaining basic familiarity with and understanding of the subject area. The second level is the planning and evaluations group whose work tasks are generally the responsibility of midlevel administrators. The planning and evaluations level needs publications that provide technical and related information to augment understanding and decision making. The third and final level of information user is the operations level, generally made up of program managers. The program manager level is most receptive to highly technical publications designed for authoritative reference by transportation technical specialists.

The Transit Advisory Office has been able to in-

corporate these identified user levels in the office's provision of technical assistance. In addition, the office has identified another dimension in user stratification: "city situation."

Reflecting on the Department of Transportation analysis (3), the Transit Advisory Office has identified four categories of potential assistance requirements that act as an additional dimension to the level of requirements for information dissemination identified in the Department of Transportation study. The city situations the Transit Advisory Office has encountered are given in Table 1.

#### RELATIONSHIP OF TRANSIT ADVISORY OFFICE TO OTHER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE APPROACHES

In retrospect, the type of assistance provided by the Transit Advisory Office varies from other technical assistance efforts primarily in its situation adaptability.

Because this was a first-time effort, UMTA allowed great flexibility to the Transit Advisory Office. It was uncertain just what assistance the cities would request, how they would react to outsiders, and if there would be a demand for assistance.

The planners often act as information brokers, providing cities with a variety of literature on available transit options. It is believed that information on options is important because cities with little or no transit planning experience may tend to gravitate to well-known alternatives instead of pursuing less well-known or innovative options that may meet local needs. The substitute staff function accommodates the needs of the cities by working with them to provide expertise in a specific area.

The planners have acted as mediators and facilitators. This role has been actively pursued in an eight-city area in eastern Los Angeles County. Here the Transit Advisory Office has helped develop a request for a transit needs assessment study incorporating elements on an intracity, intercity, and

TABLE 1 City Situation and Identified Level of Need for Assistance

CITY SITUATION	POTENTIAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS	DOT-IDENTIFIED LEVEL INFORMATION NEEDS	EXTENT ENCOUNTERED BY THE TAO PLANNERS
1) <u>Transit City</u> - Municipal Transit Service - Full Transit Planning Staff	- County and Nationwide Project and Demonstration Updates - Information Broker - Coordination Efforts	Policy	Moderate
		Planning & Evaluations	Moderate
		Operations	Minimal
2) <u>Small Operator City</u> - Dial-A-Ride - Small Circulator - Skeletal Transportation Planning Expertise	- Information Broker - Procurement Procedures - Costing/Evaluation Procedures - Resources Provider	Policy	Minimal
		Planning & Evaluations	Moderate
		Operations	Moderate
3) <u>Transit Neophyte</u> - New Transit Projects or Ideas for Projects - Little or No Transit Planning Expertise	- Advisement on Prop. A Project Eligibility - Project Design and Implementation - Procurement Procedures - Information Broker	Policy	Maximal
		Planning & Evaluations	Moderate
		Operations	Minimal
4) <u>No Transit</u> - No Documented or Perceived Transit Needs - No Ideas for Projects - No Transit Planning Expertise	- Alternatives Analysis Methodology - Advisement on Prop. A Project Eligibility - Project Design and Implementation - Advisement on Contracted Services	Policy	Variable
		Planning & Evaluations	Minimal
		Operations	Minimal

regional basis. Since first contacted by the group, the Transit Advisory Office has worked with the cities for more than 10 months in compiling the RFP, establishing an impartial consultant interview process, and advising on the proper Proposition A administrative procedures. In this effort the planners synthesized the interests of eight cities and a large county unincorporated area. Because some of the study participants assigned a low priority to carrying out the study, a principal future task of the office will be to attempt to keep the group together and avoid fragmentation while making sure the consultant considers the political and economic realities before recommending service alternatives.

#### RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS, CITY STAFF, AND THE CONSULTING COMMUNITY

##### City Staff and Elected Officials

The relationship of the Transit Advisory Office with elected officials and city staff has generally been good. Most of the working relationships have been with city staff, primarily city engineers, planners, and administrative aids. As a general rule, initial meetings have been held with the city manager, and the day-to-day contact with the office has then been delegated to city staff. There is little direct contact with elected officials. Often the planners will receive a call for assistance from city staff as a result of an elected official's request for information. When the office has had direct contact with local officials, such contact has usually been provided through a presentation to a city council (for example, when a new city council requested information for their recently elected members).

##### Consultants

Initially, the professional consulting community feared that the creation of the Transit Advisory Office would channel potential business away from them, although it was the consistently expressed intent of UMTA and LACTC not to compete with consultants.

When visiting cities, the planners make it clear that services of the office do not include services traditionally provided by consultants such as in-depth project analysis or design. The office will, however, on request from the city, work with the consultant in an effort to make sure the end product not only meets the needs of the community but also is implementable and likely to be approved by city councils.

#### WHY THE LACTC APPROACH SEEMS TO BE WORKING

Given that this is the first year of the program and the level of transit orientation among the cities before Proposition A was so low, it would be premature to make a definite statement about the overall success of the approach. However, 47 of the 84 local jurisdictions in Los Angeles County have made use of the services of the office. About 40 percent of these (19 cities) have asked for assistance that required significant time on the part of the planners in the office. A survey conducted in the summer of 1983 revealed that 85 percent of the 50 survey respondents were satisfied with the assistance provided by the office. There is speculation that the Transit Advisory Office seems to be working for a variety of reasons. Among them are

1. Addressing the perceived need for assistance: The LACTC perceived a need of local jurisdictions for an assistance office that could guide a city staff as they selected strategies for transit alternatives analysis and project implementation. The Transit Advisory Office has addressed this need by providing project ideas, assisting with program evaluation, and aiding the cities in securing consultant services if detailed service or alternatives analysis is deemed necessary or desirable.

Using this knowledge and approach to structure the office, the planners have been able to offer a commodity that effectively addresses city requests and makes efficient use of the planners' time by delegating tasks for which the expertise is readily available elsewhere.

2. Flexibility of approach to assistance provision: The task structure of the Transit Advisory Office was left flexible during the formation of the office expressly to allow the planners to adapt to the kinds of assistance requested by the local jurisdictions. This concept of flexibility was found to be one of the most desirable elements of the office, in terms of making it attractive to cities, and has been retained.

3. Cooperative, not competitive, role with city staff: Another well-received approach has been the planners' ability to act as temporary additional city staff. The success of this role has depended on the ability to develop a team effort between the Transit Advisory Office and the city that blends the city's familiarity with local characteristics, demographics, and local political concerns with the Transit Advisory Office's expertise in transit planning, alternatives analysis, and local return program guidelines.

4. Availability of federal and local expertise: One of the most significant benefits for the Transit Advisory Office in providing technical assistance to the 83 cities in Los Angeles County has been the dual association the office has with UMTA and LACTC. UMTA and its contractor, the Urban Institute, can provide a broad range of information on transit options and demonstration projects. The assistance the Transit Advisory Office offers cities is attractive, in part, because of the office's familiarity with eligible Proposition A projects, which is pertinent because Proposition A is the source of most of the municipalities' transit funding. Concurrently, the Transit Advisory Office is a relatively separate and distinct entity, reducing the threat to the local jurisdictions that "inside information" may be used against them in the project approval process.

#### ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

A number of issues and problems have been encountered by the planners in meeting requests for assistance. As outlined hereafter, these have included (a) level of innovation, (b) diversion of retail sales, (c) unnecessarily elaborate projects, (d) lack of communication between city staff and elected officials, and (e) city attitude toward transit.

##### Innovation

The expectation that Proposition A would create a rash of innovative projects has led to impatience among some LACTC governing board members. However, in authorizing the local return aspect of Proposition A, the increasingly centralized nature of transportation planning and the concomitant atrophy of local transportation expertise were not considered. This meant that local city planners would be

starting from nearly "ground zero" in terms of knowledge, and it would take considerable orientation and time to develop any projects, much less innovative ones.

### Projects

Because the money is retained on a population share basis with few strings, development of highly visible, sometimes elaborate, and often unnecessary projects by local officials is a fairly regular occurrence. Where transit is concerned, there are factors, such as local ridership levels and trip patterns, that it is necessary to analyze in order to justify expensive or grandiose projects. In facing such an issue, the Transit Advisory Office has attempted to document any factors that might negate the project's potential use and suggest alternatives that perhaps would be better suited to the particular community. Examples of projects that have been diverted include

- A shopper shuttle to be provided with a London doubledeck bus in the sparsely commercial downtown of a small city,
- An electrified guideway system for minibuses in a low-density city, and
- The construction of a transit center on a suburban college campus served by one bus line operating on hourly headways.

### Communication

Communication between local staff and elected officials is often lacking. It is common for a city council not to be notified of the availability of Transit Advisory Office assistance. Hence, a councilmember may meet with the transit planners and request the same information already relayed to city staff by the Transit Advisory Office. Conversely, a councilmember may meet with the transit planner and request the same specific information while staff conveys an entirely different need, presenting the Transit Advisory Office with a conflict to resolve.

No approach to these issues has been identified as completely right or wrong; however, the planners have been able to establish working relationships with the cities even on some of the most sensitive of issues through cooperation, suggestion, and mediation.

### Technical Assistance as Justification for the Status Quo

When the Transit Advisory Office began assisting cities in developing requests for proposals, it found that it could categorize the cities requesting such assistance in two distinct groups: those with little knowledge of residents' transit needs and who intended to use the study as a basis for decision making, and those who hoped to reinforce preexisting opinions by means of the outcome of the study. Usually this latter group included (a) cities that thought that a finding of no pressing local transit needs would encourage the commission to liberalize the Proposition A guidelines and allow use of the funds for nontransit projects and (b) cities that thought that their present local transit service was adequate for the needs of local citizens and that a study might justify not participating in projects with adjoining cities. Reasons for the latter claim include the assumed loss of local control by cities involved in a joint system, past bad experience with

a transit operator, and the belief that local people know what is best within their community. One of the goals of the Transit Advisory Office is to encourage cities to coordinate transit services, and obviously this feeling on the part of the cities presents serious and sometimes impassible roadblocks to joint ventures.

### Attitude Toward Transit in Cities Not Using Transit Advisory Office Services

The Transit Advisory Office has encountered three general types of attitudes prevailing in nonactive Los Angeles County cities: (a) apathy or antipathy, (b) postponement, and (c) indefinite delay.

1. Apathy or antipathy to local return: These cities have no projects or project ideas primarily because they feel they have no unmet transit needs and are therefore uninterested in the local return program.

2. Postponement: These cities have postponed decisions primarily for the purpose of allowing an accumulation of funds for specific high-cost projects (e.g., a park-and-ride facility). These cities have generally deferred technical assistance.

3. Indefinite delay: This attitude can be generally attributed to the inability of the city to develop a transit needs assessment strategy or an alternatives analysis methodology. Transit is often a low priority politically in these cities, yet, in many cases, assistance in transit planning is desired by city staff.

As the Transit Advisory Office developed its approach to provision of technical assistance, these various city attitudes had to be discerned by the planners, and an assessment made to determine what minimal assistance could be offered to every city, regardless of disposition. The Transit Advisory Office has found that virtually every city is interested in the information broker service that the planners provide. Notably, the "apathy or antipathy" category cities have been most receptive to this type of assistance.

### FUTURE ISSUES AND WORK

Entering its second year, the Transit Advisory Office faces a new and different set of tasks designed to enhance local awareness of key transportation issues as well as to provide feedback on specific issues of concern to the cities. Future issues to be addressed and to be undertaken by the office will include the following.

### Transit Advisory Office and Fare Reduction

Because the Transit Advisory Office has been the primary LACTC contact with the cities, the planners will be an integral part of the city workshops that are designed to inform communities about the end of the fare reduction program in 1985. The office will not only attend the initial workshops but participate in follow-up exercises in an effort to make sure cities are prepared for potential fare increases and service cuts.

### Facilitation of Increased Interaction Between Local Staff and Elected Officials

By increasing interaction between local staff and elected officials, the Transit Advisory Office will



be able to minimize potential conflicts and maximize efforts to provide efficient use of Proposition A funds. It was determined that a workshop for local staff on how better to communicate transit-related issues to elected officials would be most useful.

### Seminars

The transit planners will conduct a series of seminars on various transportation alternatives, planning, and problem areas identified through a survey mailed to all 84 jurisdictions in the county. By concentrating on these expressed needs of the cities, local staff will be better equipped to deal with elected officials.

Based on the survey results, the Transit Advisory Office will contact cities that requested assistance that might better be addressed in a one-on-one meeting instead of in a workshop setting.

### SUMMARY

There are a number of approaches that may be taken in the provision of technical assistance to localities by the MPO or other regional agencies. As pressures for decentralized decision making ("new federalism") in transportation increase, the regional agency may have to reconsider its role in the provision of technical assistance.

In the approach developed by LACTC, mediation, facilitation, and project research have been in the highest demand. Traditional technical assistance, particularly that dealing with modeling and project development, has been deemphasized. The approach de-

scribed here may be useful to other areas experiencing similar decentralization of decision making.

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