

The Oak Lawn Area Transportation Management Plan: A Public-Private Partnership

PHILIPPOS J. LOUKISSAS, JOHN D. CARRARA, JR., AND GARY L. BROSCHE

The case of the Oak Lawn area in Dallas is an example of a private initiative and of successful cooperation between residents, property owners, developers, and city officials in developing an area transportation management plan. The plan, instead of advocating the traditional approach of more and wider thoroughfares, suggests a system of traffic management activities to handle the projected increase in traffic while preserving the neighborhood character. The city council has implemented the plan in a special district ordinance for the Oak Lawn area.

The urban transportation planning process is undergoing critical transformations. Of particular interest is the emergence of private sector involvement in the planning, management, financing, and construction of transportation systems.

The concept of private sector participation in the planning process is not new. It stems from the community participation principles developed in the late 1960s and was anticipated in sections 3(e) of the UMTA Act of 1964 as amended in 1983. The underlying rationale for private sector participation is that the degree of involvement in the planning phases is related to the participant's attitude and behavior in subsequent phases. If the private sector assumes greater involvement in the formulation of plans, it can be expected that it will have an acceptance of the program and a strong interest in its implementation.

Private sector efforts are often undertaken to address needs that are not perceived to be adequately filled by the public sector and that are of particular concern. Regional and subarea mobility planning and management private initiatives have been successfully implemented in several major cities including Dallas, Hartford, Houston, and Los Angeles (1-3).

Reviewed in this paper is the successful cooperation between residents, property owners, developers, and city officials in tackling mobility problems in the Oak Lawn area in Dallas. This case study is part of a larger research project on private sector involvement in urban transportation conducted by the Joint Center for Urban Mobility Research at Rice Center (1, 4).

Overall, there is considerable private sector involvement in

transportation planning and implementation in the Dallas area. Most of the involvement to date has been on an ad hoc basis with the public and private sectors coming together to address specific problems as needed. Public and private sponsors in the rapidly growing north Dallas area have agreed on a transportation management program that includes reduction of parking requirements, mandatory ridesharing and transit support, and an independent, ongoing funding mechanism (5). Private sector involvement is allowing the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) to expand transit services quickly and cost effectively throughout its service area. For example, a group of local businessmen on McKinney Avenue has formed the McKinney Avenue Transportation Authority (MATA) and is bringing back antique trolleys in an effort to link the downtown with the commercial development in the Oak Lawn area. So far, MATA, which plans to operate the trolley system privately, has been able to raise more than \$2 million to fund capital construction and operations.

The Oak Lawn area of Dallas is north of and immediately adjacent to the downtown (Figure 1). It is a transition area between the commercial downtown and the exclusive residential communities of Highland Park and University Park. The area encompasses a broad spectrum of income groups in residential neighborhoods as well as a diversity of businesses and developments. Some portions of Oak Lawn have a historic character and some represent the latest in high-density commercial development. Some parts of the area maintain an appeal as older residential neighborhoods. Oak Lawn also is beginning to experience intensive commercial development, which has spread from downtown along the major thoroughfares passing through the area.

The area's office employment was expected to grow from 16,800 workers in 1985 to 48,800 workers in 1988. The additional 8.1 million net square feet of office space under construction or planned by 1988 will bring the total office space to 12.2 million net square feet (6). Even though the rate of growth has slowed during 1986, the Oak Lawn area still maintains one of the higher office occupancy rates in the city of Dallas. The mixed residential and commercial land uses have led to conflicts between residents, developers, and the city, which has attempted to respond to both groups.

In 1982, area residents, businessmen, and developers formed the Oak Lawn Forum and in cooperation with the city prepared a plan to identify problems and achieve a consensus on the orderly evolution of the area.

P. J. Loukissas and G. L. Brosch, Joint Center for Urban Mobility Research, 9 Greenway Plaza, Suite 1900, Houston, Tex. 77046. J. D. Carrara, Jr., Barry M. Goodman Assoc., Inc., 1200 Smith, Suite 3530, Houston, Tex. 77002.

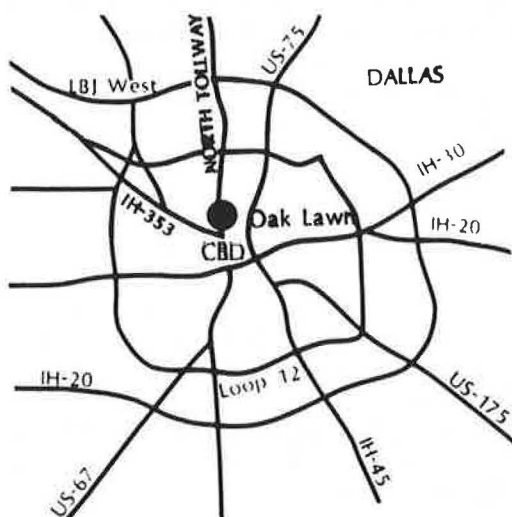
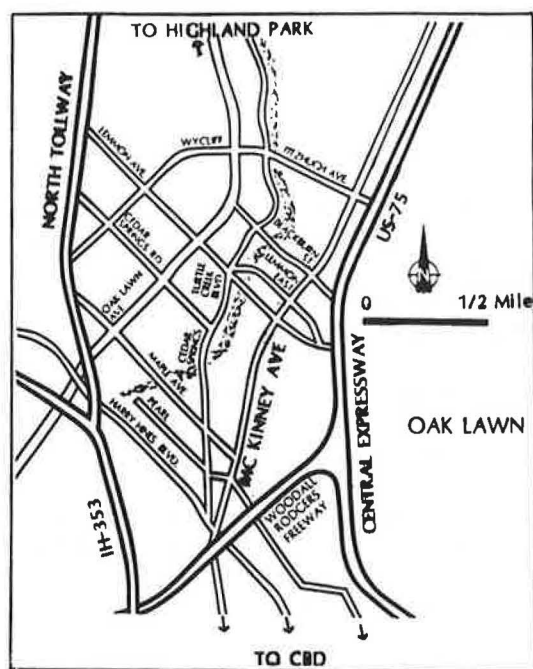


FIGURE 1 Map of Oak Lawn area north of and adjacent to downtown Dallas.

THE TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Oak Lawn Forum's first activity was to study a broad range of study problems and potential solutions. An extensive amount of time was spent identifying the objectives of the Oak Lawn Forum members. The resultant plan addressed issues of zoning, neighborhood stability, protection of the unique retail environment, landscaping, parking, esthetics, urban design, and transportation (7). Transportation was one of the largest and most difficult issues to resolve.

Overall, the program was unique for Dallas at the time in that the city and private interest groups in the area worked together to devise a comprehensive set of guidelines and plans for bringing a high quality of life to the area over a short period

of time. The transportation planning for the Oak Lawn area was especially unique. The leaders of the Oak Lawn Forum demanded an approach completely different from typical transportation planning. Instead of advocating more and wider streets and freeways to accommodate ever increasing traffic, they advocated fewer, narrower roads along with other traffic management activities to more effectively handle traffic, while preserving the appearance and residential character of the neighborhoods.

The basic premise of the Oak Lawn Forum leaders was that the streets currently were inadequate to serve increased development activity. Widening the streets as shown on the city's major thoroughfare plan would have been permanently disruptive to the neighborhood and would have still not provided enough capacity to easily accommodate all of the traffic generated in the area as well as traffic that would pass through the area to access the downtown. As an alternative, the Oak Lawn Forum proposed minimal street improvements but an extensive array of techniques to more effectively manage traffic rather than to let traffic run rampant over the Oak Lawn area.

More specifically, the plan recommended a number of actions (7), including

- Reduction of retail, residential, and office parking ratios to encourage transit use and to encourage developers to provide incentives for higher automobile occupancy and transit use among their tenants. Recommended reductions would achieve the double objective of smaller, less obtrusive parking facilities in the neighborhood and fewer cars on the streets.
- Development of a transportation systems management plan.
- Continuation of high zoning density to accommodate substantial growth in the Oak Lawn area.
- Increased use and availability of public transit through more frequent DART service and an internal shuttle bus system.
- Use of miscellaneous alternatives to automobiles and public transit such as jitneys, private trolleys, taxis, and ridesharing.

In June 1984, the first phase of a more detailed internal transit planning study was completed (8). The plan again recommended closer working relationships with the Dallas Transit System (DTS) and DART, development of a local shuttle service (with a private operator recommended as the most cost-effective approach), and the establishment of an area-wide ridesharing coordinating service. That program was scheduled to be in place by the end of 1986.

The initial effort was concluded with adoption in February 1985 by the city council of a special district ordinance for the Oak Lawn area (9). This ordinance was realized after many months of discussions between the Oak Lawn Forum and city officials. In the ordinance, parking ratios required for most land use categories were reduced by 10 percent as an incentive for developers to make a payment into the Oak Lawn transit fund, prepare an improved traffic management agreement, or qualify as a mixed-use development with shared parking. The traffic management plan required each developer to state a specific, detailed plan for traffic mitigation measures such as carpooling,

vanpooling, bus pass subsidy, subscription transit, or bicycling programs. Specific vehicle trip reduction goals had to be achieved within 2 years. One of the plan recommendations included the development of a bus shuttle system for the area.

A DART study found that the proposed transit shuttle was feasible and DART has tentatively become committed to operate the system. As of April 1987, the Oak Lawn Forum was developing criteria for the use of the transit fund. One possible use was for the operation of the bus shuttle. The Oak Lawn Forum anticipated raising additional funds through a destination marketing program to cover part of the system's operating deficit.

Implementation Problems

Adoption of this ordinance was not easy to achieve. Deviation from the thoroughfare plan and extensive reliance on transit has been very unusual in a city such as Dallas with only a 2 to 3 percent peak-hour transit mode split. The city department of transportation (DOT) was concerned about the practicality of some aspects of the program.

Traffic forecasts indicated increasing need for thoroughfare improvements, not downgrading of the existing plan. There was no detailed program for providing transit, and transit in Dallas has not been used extensively, so the city DOT was skeptical that the alternatives offered could be successful unless there was a deep and continuing commitment to trip reduction by the city DOT, Oak Lawn Forum leaders, and all other concerned groups in the Oak Lawn area. Because setbacks for street easements were reduced or eliminated in the plan, there was no fallback position in case of failure of the Forum approach.

Initially, the city DOT staff was concerned about the proposed McKinney trolley's impact on existing traffic, expecting increases in actual congestion because of the trolley's stop and go operations. The city staff in transportation, planning, and other departments has worked closely with the Oak Lawn plan as it has developed in order to arrive at a mutually agreeable program.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Oak Lawn Forum experience provides important lessons with potentially far-reaching ramifications. As in most cases of private sector involvement, the initiative came from the private sector (1). Interaction between the developers, property owners, and the city has brought about fresh ways of addressing traffic congestion. Developer incentive programs and intensive area transit treatment have been substituted for costly construction projects. It is still uncertain how the reduction in the local economic growth will affect implementation of the plan. Close monitoring of the results is needed so that adjustments to the plans can be made if necessary. So far, there has been a delay in the plan implementation that may be attributed to changes in local conditions.

In the following sections is a discussion of economic, political, and administrative issues bearing on the plan. An attempt is made to draw lessons for the benefit of other community areas

that are considering such public-private partnerships for the solution of mobility problems.

Financial and Economic Benefits and Costs

The Oak Lawn plan has not been approached or evaluated from an economic perspective. If the plan is ultimately successful in maintaining the Oak Lawn area as a desirable close-in residential environment, then residential land values could be maintained or increased, thereby financially benefiting the residents and the tax base. The plan places a somewhat greater burden on developers because of recommendations for

- More costly below-ground parking,
- Traffic impact assessment studies,
- Subsequent on-site and off-site improvements,
- Contributions to a transit and traffic management plan, and
- Contributions to the transit fund.

These costs are partly offset by reduced parking ratios and increased development allowed where setbacks have been eased. It remains to be seen whether the development modifications will be viewed as amenities to the extent that commercial development projects in the area will be attractive to tenants. The city is certainly being relieved of the cost of many thoroughfare improvements.

Political and Administrative Issues

The administration of this program will present some additional burden to the city of Dallas. However, that burden may be a small price to pay for the harmonious coexistence of residents and developers in the Oak Lawn area. Moreover, the lack of thoroughfare improvements will put a great deal of pressure on the traffic management plan and those who administer it. The plan includes transit and traffic elements and mandatory fees to support them.

There is also an equity issue that needs to be addressed. There is no provision to make any requirements or participation in this plan retroactive. In other words, developments begun before the ordinance was passed, although contributing to the problems in the area, have no responsibility to contribute to solutions.

Lessons

Many participants can learn from the Oak Lawn planning process. Residents can learn to work with developers and governmental agencies rather than merely resisting various pressures to change. Developers can learn that by joining with nearby residents, mutually beneficial plans can be devised to satisfy the needs of both sides. City and other governmental agencies can learn to be more open to innovative approaches that may reduce strife between competing interests within the community. These agencies can also learn that the private sector can be interested in the community good and peaceful

coexistence rather than retain purely selfish motives for their isolated developments.

City government may inadvertently frustrate the private sector through its "red tape." Frustration stems partly from the private sector's lack of familiarity with agency procedures and the occasional delays of any bureaucracy. All agencies should keep these same factors in mind to streamline their interaction with private sector organizations. There is a continuing need for all involved parties to be reminded of the tremendous continuing efforts that will be required for the success of this cooperation. Despite concerns, the planning and transportation staffs, the board of directors of the Oak Lawn Forum, and the majority of city council members believe that with diligent effort the alternative approaches can be made to work.

Until the final mix of services is operating for a significant period of time, it will be difficult to determine which approach is better: the traditional or the experimental. The traditional approach has the drawback of addressing capacity needs on an interim basis. The Oak Lawn approach, which attempts to manage transportation demand and services, is not widely tested and may require changes in habits and extensive efforts on the part of all parties concerned to ensure any degree of success. Whether the plan ultimately succeeds or fails, the primary benefit is a lesson in the building of cooperative spirit bringing all the parties together in the program, which is unique and experimental in nature but has the potential for extensive mutual benefits.

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