

Urban Workshop Report

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The Urban Workshop began with an assessment of current trends and issues in the Urban Planning process and their relationship to data requirements.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY ISSUES

First, it was concluded that the pendulum is swinging back toward longer range thinking, not instead of—but in addition to—the recent short-range focus of planning. The future emphasis will be on both factors rather than on one or the other. Highway operations planning is an example of the short-term focus, and land use planning is an example of the focus on the longer term. Second, the scale of activities is again balanced between broad regional efforts and highly localized trouble-shooting activities. All of these trends will place extensive information burdens on the planning process.

Dramatic changes in the demographic, economic, and spatial character of metropolitan centers have challenged local planning capabilities. The lack of adequate financial resources and supporting programs to produce adequate data has retarded the effectiveness of metropolitan planning.

The prime issue is highway congestion, in both urban and suburban areas. Parts of the congestion concern include the relating of existing facilities and services to the new circumferential patterns of contemporary commuting. Although most critical in high growth areas, all parts of the nation are experiencing congestion effects. The adequacy of current planning tools and data to forecast and assess prospective demand, and evaluate alternative responses is in serious question.

Beyond congestion issues are those that relate to obtaining greater capacity and efficiency in the use of existing facilities including operational and management improvements for highways and transit. The ability to evaluate the effectiveness and consequences of various supply and demand “management” schemes is a critical need for the current planning process. The growing needs to serve non-work related travel and congestion emphasizes the need for comprehensive planning rather than simply commuter-related planning.

A final set of issues relates to the linkage of transportation to overall land use concerns, access to low-cost housing, and the problems of dealing with rapid growth.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The mandated requirement for a continuing process of monitoring and reporting transportation trends in urban areas that was rescinded in 1983 needs to be reconsidered. The value of such a process is agreed to by all, but it is not clear that federal mandates must be the answer.

2. The program to produce the special journey to work package (the CTPP), an agreement between the states and the Bureau of the Census, is the single highest priority for meeting urban data requirements and should be fully supported by local governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), states, and federal agencies.

3. UMTA and FHWA should undertake programs to encourage and support collateral data collection activities in the 1990s that would complement the decennial census data collection effort. These collateral activities include surveying non-work trips, consideration of urban freight data needs, and external travel, particularly in small metropolitan areas.

4. Consideration should be given to a continuing performance measurement process for metropolitan areas. The data set developed in a study of performance measurement needs in 1976 should form the basis for such a reevaluation. An NCHRP synthesis of effective practice in this area is warranted.

5. A national congestion-monitoring data set providing public information on traffic trends in major cities was identified as a needed and useful undertaking to inform national policy and support comparative analyses in individual metropolitan areas.

6. A condition and performance monitoring capability for transit, akin to the HPMS is needed, particularly to gain knowledge of capital reconstruction needs for fixed transit facilities. A parallel highway program related to UMTA Section 15 reporting was noted as desirable.