Starting a Regional Transportation Planning Organization

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As urban areas grow, they eventually fill up the central core cities and often subsume neighboring towns and cities that were previously separate. Cross-border travel patterns thus defy service at the municipal scale, requiring instead that large regions containing many jurisdictions work together. The process is described by which the jurisdictions of the 13-county, 100-mi region surrounding Charlotte, North Carolina, formed a new superregional transportation planning organization, larger than metropolitan planning organizations and counties, across two states. The emerging need for such agencies is reviewed, and the Charlotte organization—the Carolinas Transportation Compact (CTC)—is described in detail. A strong project-oriented work program, a neutral host, advocacy instead of operating roles, local funding, and galvanizing issues are necessary to success. The future of CTC is bright because it has developed solid complementary working relationships with state and local governments and provides a forum for the pursuit of cooperative regional solutions to regional problems.

As many urban areas grow and expand, they fill up the area included in the traditional urban transportation planning process and often subsume neighboring areas that were previously separate towns and cities. The new region, bigger and more complex, requires more complex spatial planning at the regional scale and introduces greater complexity into the political context. It also provides an opportunity for the area to address transportation problems in a truly comprehensive way, because it brings the planning process into balance with the multicounty environment used by citizens and businesses in their daily travel patterns. In a region in which one metropolitan area dominates the landscape, the political and economic structure may vary significantly from one part to another. The economy and dynamics of such a region will generate transportation problems, as surrounding towns and even the central city become interdependent parts of the larger metropolitan region. Citizens commute across political boundaries without second thought as to what effect this has on the economy and on the transportation system. But the political structure of the region may not be as developed as the economic structure. This problem can be resolved if there is a sound regional planning organization that can act according to the pressures and problems caused by a growing multigovernmental region. The intent of this paper is to describe the processes that led to a large superregional transportation planning organization in the Charlotte, North Carolina–South Carolina, area. Discussion will center on the case study of Charlotte and the efforts made and methods used to coordinate a regional transportation planning organization.

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EMERGING GROWTH PATTERNS

The provision of transportation facilities and services on a regional scale is important for several reasons. Economic growth and the corresponding travel generated from this growth do not generally respect geographical or political boundaries. Across the United States, most recent growth has occurred in areas outside the traditional control of the central city, resulting in a diverse regional pattern of development. These regional development patterns are both a by-product of and a cause for our current transportation systems. The widespread use of the automobile in the post–World War II era as well as an advanced highway system has made it possible for people to live many miles from their jobs. Therefore, transportation systems have increased the American society's mobility and have promoted increased, dispersed development patterns throughout the region.

Dispersed growth, as much as we appear to like it, can create special problems. Land use patterns are less dense and make most types of public transit service impractical. Suburban land use patterns have also made increased automobile use necessary, which has added to the pollution, traffic congestion, and energy consumption of the nation. Much of the nation's regional growth has occurred in the neighboring counties of central cities. This decentralization of the urban population has become a dominating force shaping the urban region in the post–World War II era. Growth in the outlying rings has accelerated, but growth in many central cities has stabilized or declined. Between 1940 and 1970 the growth rates of central cities and suburban fringes have differed by as much as 20 percent. Between 1960 and 1980 the differences in this growth assumed a regional pattern. In Northeast and North-Central regions, central city losses have increased and suburban growth itself has begun to slow. In the West, growth in both areas has increased but is now beginning to slow. It is in the South where this decentralization in the metropolitan area has continued at a strong pace. The differences in the outlying and central city growth in the South are a function not only of increases in the number of metropolitan counties but also of net migration balances between central cities, ring or edge communities, and nonmetropolitan counties. In the South, the flows in and out of the central city and urban areas were more heavily biased to suburbs than were other regions (Table 1) (*1*). This spillover has brought pressure to create

TABLE 1 Percentage Change in Populations: Center City and Suburban Ring by Region, 1960–1980

Region	Percent Change in Population			
	1960-1970		1970-1980	
	Center City	Suburban ring	Center City	Suburban ring
Northeast	-1.9	19.2	-7.3	13.5
North Central	-0.3	26.8	-4.4	23.3
South	11.2	35.6	18.2	69.0
West	18.0	37.1	19.3	34.5

Source: US Bureau of Census

public planning entities that are larger than those of the traditional county.

Transportation planners have, of course, been aware of the regional transportation phenomenon for almost as long as the automobile has been in existence. In 1916 Congress passed the Federal Road Act, which mandated that each state establish a highway department to rank and choose transportation projects to receive federal funding. During the 1930s and 1940s Congress often debated the need for intercity connectivity. The 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act established the Interstate Highway System. The roots of transportation planning go back to the early 1900s, but regional multimodal transportation planning, in the urban-suburban-rural sense, was first mandated by the Federal Highway Act of 1962. This act required that metropolitan areas of 50,000 or greater establish by July 1, 1965, a "coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing" transportation planning process for the urbanized area and the surrounding land area likely to become urbanized. This act mandated local and state governments to begin cooperative transportation planning functions for an entire urban area, which usually meant planning for more than one jurisdiction. During the early 1960s, the forerunner of the metropolitan transportation planning organizations were established, and planning activities were undertaken for almost all of the more than 250 urbanized areas. For those areas in which the metropolitan area encompassed more than one state, cooperative ventures were formed. The 1973 Federal Highway Act was the start of federally mandated metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). MPOs were to be designated by the governor of each state for metropolitan areas to "perform metropolitan planning" (*2*). The MPO was envisioned to cover a growing urban area and to deal with the problem of traffic congestion on an areawide rather than geopolitical basis.

This organizational structure served quite well through the 1970s and into the 1980s. But in the late 1970s regional growth patterns began to change in many ways. A rapid development of rural areas and cities outside the urban core was propelled by a healthy economic environment, lower land values at the fringe, and increasing interstate transportation access. Much of this growth occurred in the Southeast and Southwest. The space inside large metropolitan regions began to fill as regional development spread across the area. Metropolitan superstrips, covering several hundred miles in some cases, evolved on a relatively large scale. Even "rec-opolises" began to emerge, containing high levels of activity for certain periods of the year, underpinned by a narrowly based economy dependent on recreational development. Each of these changes accelerated demands on the transportation system to handle the travel it generated and put pressures on the organizations responsible for managing and planning for change. Congress realized that economic growth and transportation congestion do not respect political boundaries. A 1980 publication from the U.S. Department of Transportation states: "Ideally, the MPO is in a position to coordinate the various elements of the transportation system to shape orderly development of the metropolitan area" (*2*). This report went on to say that the MPO has failed to reach its ideal because it has no statutory operating or construction authority.

The 1990s are likely to see continued evolution of the regional nature of transportation planning. Pressure to expand current urban boundaries (based on the 1990 census) include more participants and undertake more cooperating planning balanced by declining real funds for planning, a possible refocus of the federal role away from urban areas, and increasing competition between the suburbs and the city. In many areas, disagreements between factions have fragmented the cooperative base of planning; in the New York City metropolitan area, the region has dissolved its regional planning structure in favor of several subregional structures focusing on state and county portions of the area. These tensions imply that the evolution of a regional system of transportation planning is by no means ensured in many areas, perhaps not even likely in some.

REGIONAL PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

Various kinds of regional planning agency exist today. At one end of the spectrum are the large superagencies performing region-building and operating functions for multicounty areas or corridors. Examples are the Portland (Oreg.) and Washington (D.C.) metropolitan transportation authorities. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) was formed in 1967 to plan, finance, and construct a rapid transit system for Washington, D.C. (*3*). Its makeup included elected officials from Washington and the neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia. Later, in 1973, WMATA gained operating authority for the transit system as well as power to acquire and operate bus services, so that now it operates the whole region's system. WMATA has no dedicated fund source from the states; its revenues come from fares and concessions and from local government contributors. In Portland the regional operator, TRIMET, is responsible for service provision in a three-county area, and funds come from a payroll tax. TRIMET also evolved from a transit bus operator to build a transit line. The regional planning agency expanded its functions to become METRO, a regional authority responsible

for land use planning and solid waste disposal, separate from TRIMET. Another one of the first regional agencies was the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, formed in 1970 by the California Legislature for the San Francisco Bay Area. It is responsible for overall transportation planning for the area and is currently empowered to review and approve the allocations of transportation funds for projects.

One of the more common forms of an areawide planning organization is the MPO. These groups are responsible for general-purpose transportation planning for the urbanized area surrounding the central city. Most MPOs cover just this area, but a few—primarily in New York City, Arizona, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—cover larger regions of the state (K. E. Heanue, unpublished data, 1989). Because federal aid and requirements had declined from 1978 to 1983, MPOs were becoming increasingly isolated from decision making, more special-purpose funded, less comprehensive, shorter range in focus, and under strong pressure to subregionalize rather than to broaden areas of coverage (*4*). MPOs may try to be regional planning organizations, but in most cases they do not have the power or authority to function as such.

CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA–SOUTH CAROLINA, AND THE CAROLINAS TRANSPORTATION COMPACT

Charlotte and Region

Charlotte, North Carolina–South Carolina (NC-SC), provides a good example of a region in which growth (economic, population, infrastructure, etc.) is not limited to the boundaries of one city or even one county. Charlotte and Mecklenburg County are the center of the Charlotte–Gastonia–Rock Hill metropolitan statistical area. The Charlotte metro region, however, consists of 13 counties that include both North and South Carolina (Figure 1). The core city, Charlotte, is the largest city in the two Carolinas and serves as the major business hub for the two states (*5*). Charlotte has a 1990 population of more than 400,000, ranked 37th in the nation. Mecklenburg County has a population of 511,433 (*6*). First Union Corporation and North Carolina National Bank (NCNB) are headquartered in Charlotte, making it the sixth-largest financial center in the nation. NCNB's merger with C&S Sovran has created NationsBank, the nation's fourth-largest bank; its headquarters is in Charlotte. In 1987 Charlotte was the sixth-largest wholesale trade center (in terms of sales) in the country. The region has a population of approximately 1.6 million, which ranks 28th out of all other metropolitan areas (*5*). Population in the region grew by 15.9 percent between 1980 and 1990. Table 2 illustrates the growth of the Charlotte, NC-SC, region by county. As shown in Figure 1, the central Mecklenburg County core is ringed by cities that have their own MPO planning process (Rock Hill; Gastonia; Concord/Kannapolis; Hickory) and other developing cities such as Monroe, Albemarle, Salisbury, Statesville, and Shelby.

The substantial economic vitality that this region has experienced has come tied not just to the city but to the region, which stands poised to grow (or fail to grow) as a whole. Many large activity sites and projects depend on promoting the region, not just Charlotte. Many facilities and organizations serve the region, including Charlotte/Douglas International Airport, the National Basketball Association's Charlotte Hornets, the Charlotte Motor Speedway, the Charlotte Coliseum, a possible National Football League stadium and franchise, museums, orchestras, and lakes and recreational facilities. In addition many issues are receiving attention at a regional level: economic development, water and lake systems, and transportation.

One of the prime reasons for the growth of the Charlotte region comes from its location at the crossroads of two major Interstates (I-85 and I-77) and from the proximity of I-40. Much of the growth enjoyed by the region occurred during the automobile era, with all the attendant characteristics of such: urban development spreading into surrounding suburbs, growth of ring cities, and development of previously rural areas. These land use characteristics encouraged continued reliance on the private auto for travel. In-commuting to Charlotte is substantial because of the size and centrality of the city to the region. There are 90,000 to 100,000 net in-commuters who come into Mecklenburg County each day. Interstate travel volumes approaching Charlotte range from 50,000 to 70,000 vehicles daily, and traffic is increasing rapidly. Traffic problems in and around the Charlotte area have become a major issue facing not only Mecklenburg County but all of the region: a *U.S. News and World Report* article, quoting an FHWA study, stated that Charlotte would be the most congested urban area in the United States by the year 2005 (*7*). Even though the statement was later retracted, Charlotte's reputation suffered; traffic problems helped to defeat the incumbent mayor's reelection in 1987. Vehicle miles traveled are expected to double between 1985 and 2000. Officials say it will be physically impossible to build all the necessary roads to handle the traffic growth, even if money were available. Even with the apparent traffic problems in Charlotte, it is recognized that the problem has regional proportions. There is congestion caused by commuters along main arterials among the surrounding towns, cities and counties, and the city itself (Figure 2).

The region has a good radial highway system in most directions but suffers from a lack of circumferential service. Traffic congestion exits throughout the entire region but is extremely heavy in the south and southeast areas. Improvements under way and planned on key Interstates, coupled with other planned highway improvements, should ensure that the highway system will perform well into the next century. The region's role in international and intercity travel is also substantial. Charlotte/Douglas International Airport is one of the busiest in the nation. The Charlotte region has an excellent rail system that provides overnight freight and passenger service to much of the eastern seaboard.

Transportation access is a critical factor in determining economic growth. A recent assessment of growth rates in North Carolina shows that those counties with the highest accessibility are those that are growing the most rapidly. Thus, a major issue in the Charlotte region is how to balance economic expansion, growth, quality of life, and lifestyle of the living environment.

Formation of Carolinas Transportation Compact

Local elected city and county officials began to recognize the need for a regional multicounty, bistate transportation plan-

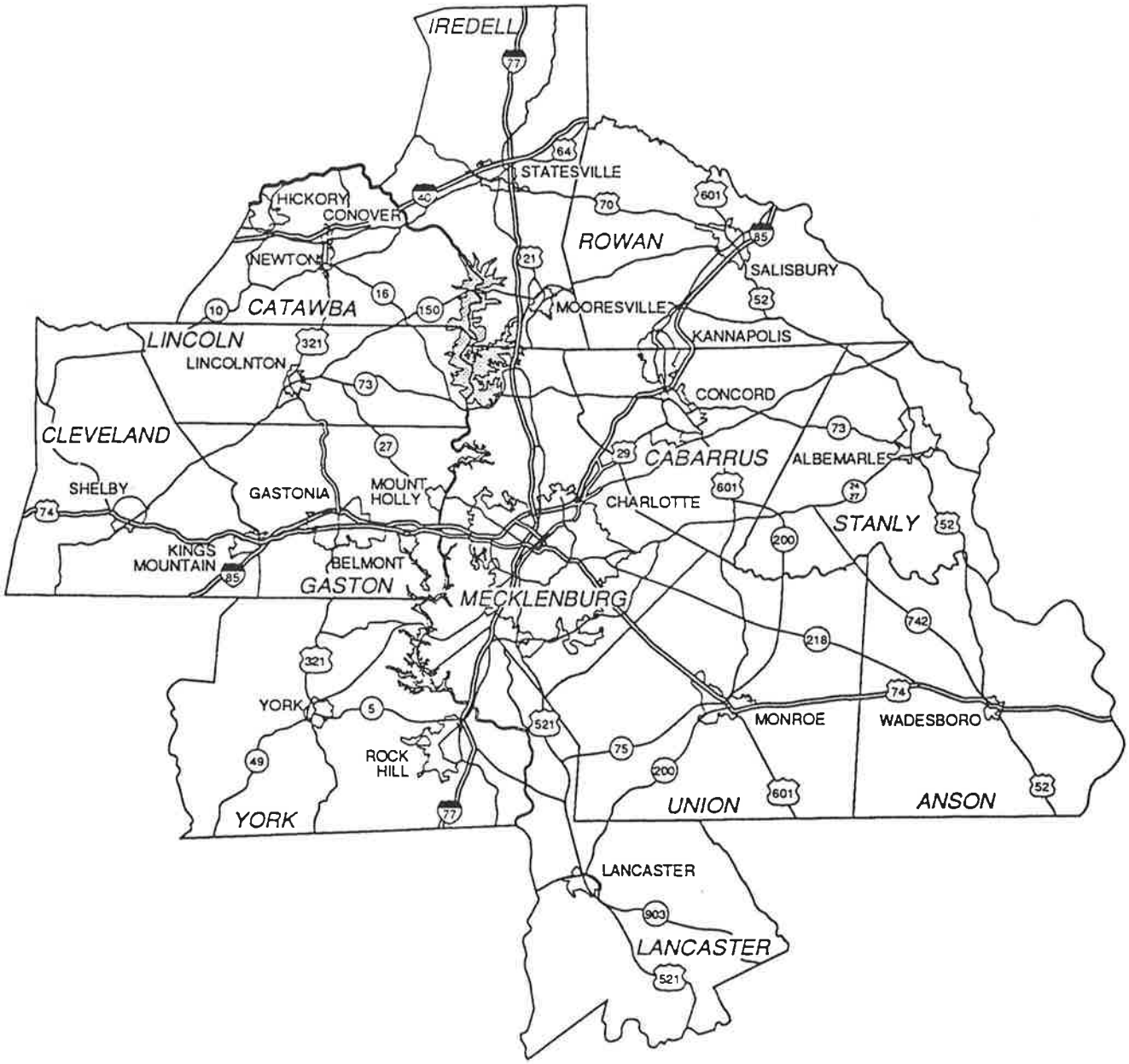

FIGURE 1 Charlotte metropolitan region: Hub of the Carolinas.

ning agency for Charlotte and the region. This perceived need, after building for some time, began to take shape with the establishment of the Carolinas Counties Coalition in 1985. This group, which consisted of elected officials, was formed to pursue regional agendas for the Charlotte, NC-SC, metropolitan area and the neighboring counties. The group identified transportation access as one of its critical issues for the region. There was considerable interest in a second-tier ring road around Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, which would later become known as the Carolinas Parkway. This road was envisioned to circumscribe Charlotte at 30 to 40 mi limits, connecting the counties in the outer ring (Figure 3). This loop would provide access to the region's Interstate systems and connect north-south and east-west Interstates. Within the coalition, a transportation task force was formed to undertake all transportation-related issues. The coalition recognized the linkages between continued transportation improvements and continued regional growth and quality of life. This task force was formed to determine precisely what transportation issues should be addressed by the group and to recommend ways to further the agenda.

In the early days, the task force was represented by each of the eight counties in the region immediately surrounding Charlotte, including South Carolina. Each county contributed three members to the task force. These members were also elected or appointed officials from county governments of major cities. The task force established a three-person executive committee and elected a chairperson. The task force was charged with developing an administrative and organi-

TABLE 2 Carolinas Transportation Compact, Population and Growth from 1980 to 1990

COUNTY	1980 POP.	1990 POP.	% CHANGE	1990 POP. % OF TOTAL
COUNTIES IN N.C.				
ANSON	25,649	23,474	-8.48%	1.48%
CABARRUS	85,895	98,935	15.18%	6.23%
CATAWBA	105,208	118,412	12.55%	7.46%
CLEVELAND	83,435	84,714	1.53%	5.33%
GASTON	162,568	175,093	7.70%	11.03%
IREDELL	82,538	92,931	12.59%	5.85%
LINCOLN	42,372	50,319	18.76%	3.17%
MECKLENBURG	404,270	511,433	26.51%	32.21%
ROWAN	99,186	110,605	11.51%	6.97%
STANLY	48,517	51,765	6.69%	3.26%
UNION	70,435	84,211	19.56%	5.30%
Sub Total NC Counties	*1,210,073*	*1,401,892*	*15.85%*	*88.29%*
COUNTIES IN S.C.				
LANCASTER	53,361	54,516	2.16%	3.43%
YORK	106,720	131,497	23.22%	8.28%
Sub Total SC Counties	*160,081*	*186,013*	*16.20%*	*11.71%*
TOTAL ALL COUNTIES	1,370,154	1,587,905	15.89%	100.00%

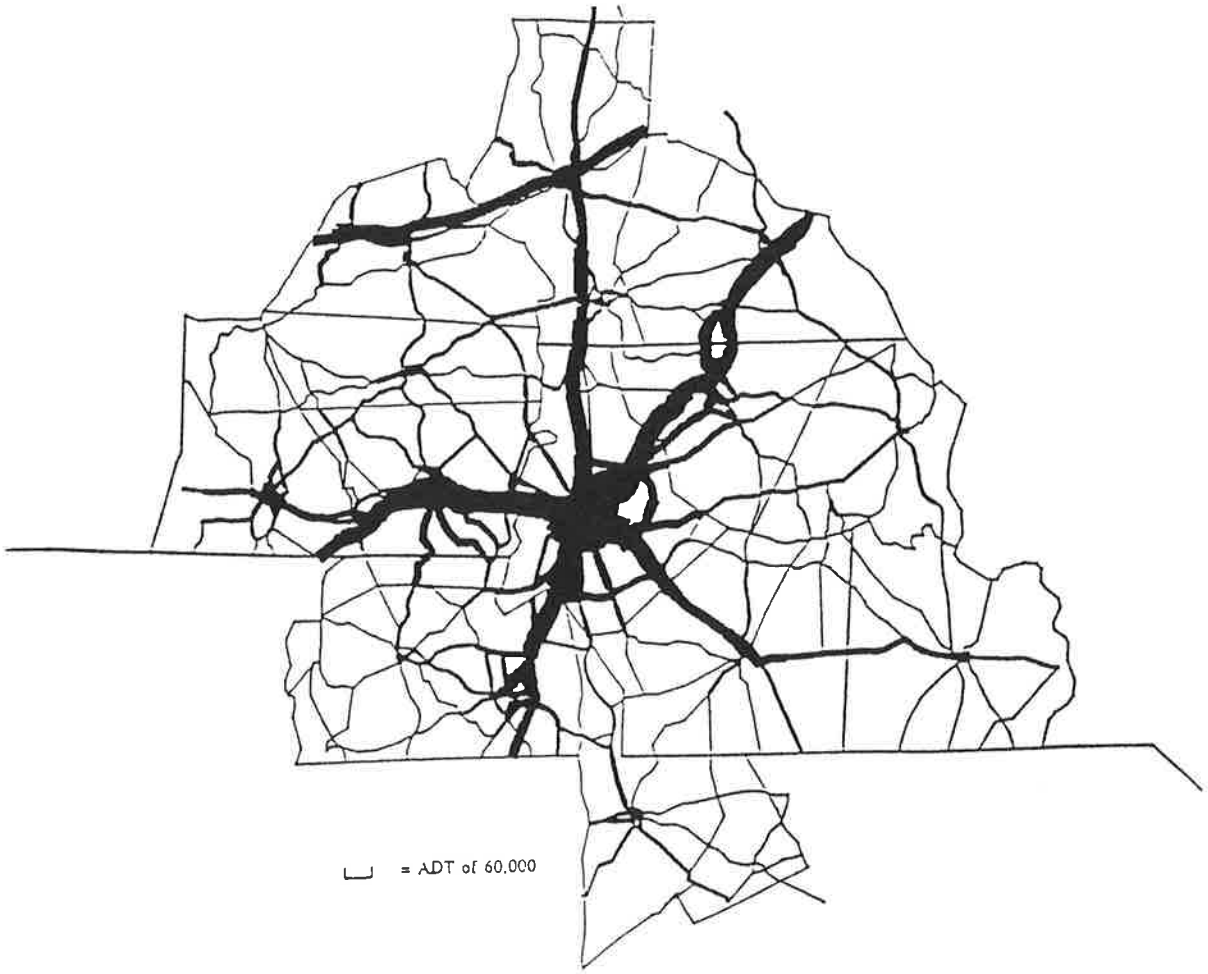

FIGURE 2 Traffic volumes within the Charlotte metropolitan region.

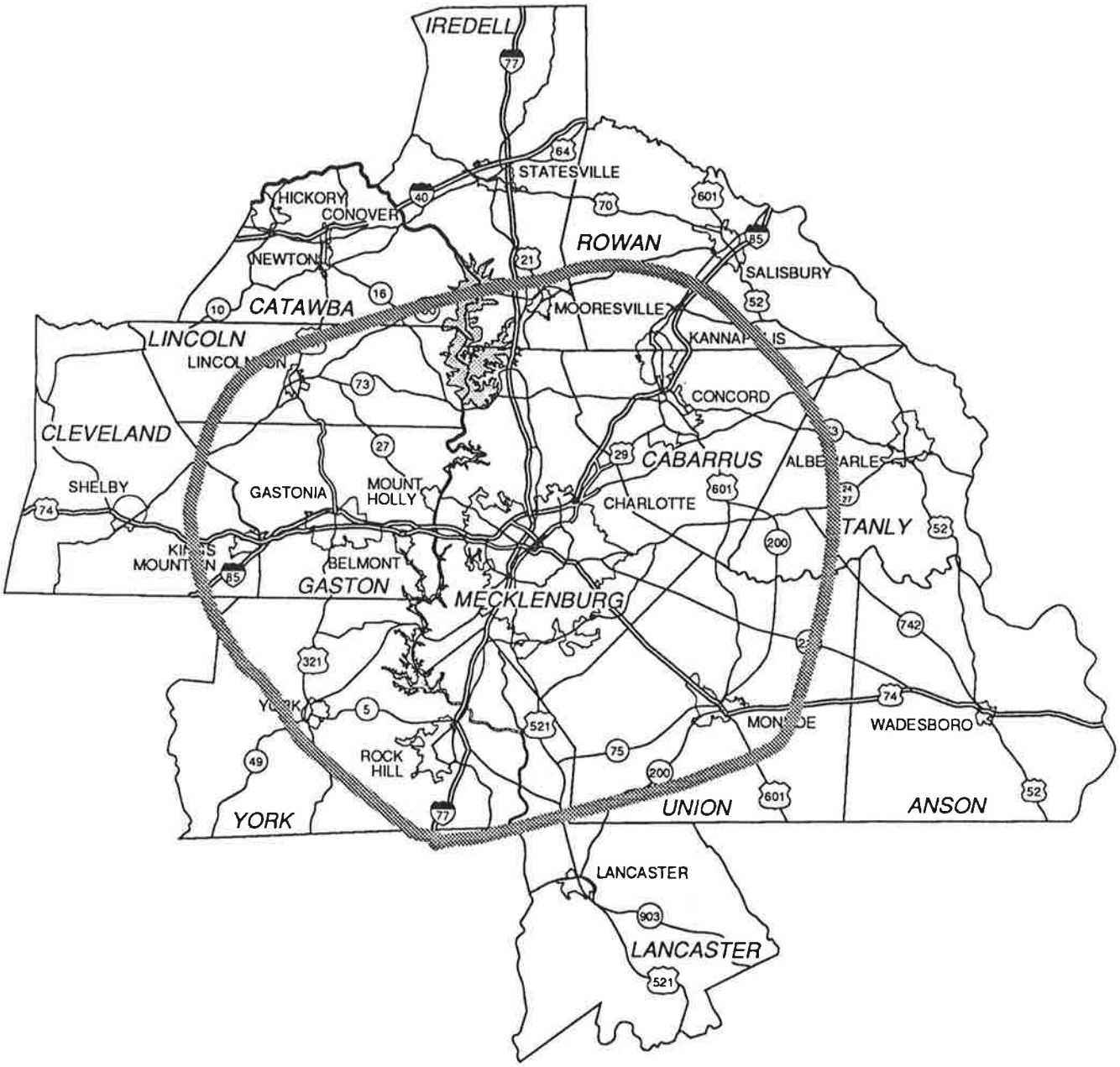

FIGURE 3 Proposed Carolinas Parkway, Charlotte metropolitan region.

zational plan for establishing a transportation planning and funding organization for the region.

At this time, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) became involved with the Carolinas Counties Coalition. The university offered assistance by organizing and hosting a series of meetings, over a 6-month period, for task force members. Faculty associates of the Urban Institute, a university-affiliated think tank, were able to assist the task force by structuring its issues, helping it review materials, maintaining national and state perspectives, and otherwise providing technical expertise. The university also has provided a convenient central meeting place, available space and facilities, and a readily available administrative pool for preparing reports and materials. The task force began its work in January 1989; the first four major items to be undertaken were mission statement, goals and objectives, organizational structure, and funding options. The group concluded its mission by recommending that a separate regional transportation planning organization be established to plan and promote all modes of transportation in the 13-county region.

The Carolinas Transportation Compact (CTC) is the regional transportation planning organization that grew directly out of the task force recommendations. The CTC was formed to advocate regional transportation needs in the Charlotte, NC-SC, region. The CTC consists of elected representatives from 13 counties and a representative from each of the two state transportation agencies. The counties involved are Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln,

Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, and Union from North Carolina and Lancaster and York from South Carolina (Figure 1). The mission statement adopted for the CTC is "to serve the individual counties by establishing coordinated, continuing, comprehensive, and proactive efforts to acquire federal, state and local resources for planning, constructing, operating and maintaining adequate regional transportation facilities that enhance the quality of life in each county and the economic opportunity of the region." The development of goals and objectives were undertaken along with the development of the mission statement. Recognizing the responsibilities of other agencies in the region to plan, build, and operate transportation systems, CTC agreed upon a set of goals that includes proactive planning but leaves the construction of transportation systems in the hands of the North Carolina and South Carolina departments of transportation (DOTs). The goals encourage existing organizations to plan at the superregional scale in cooperation with the CTC. Within counties and cities, the CTC leaves local governments the role of preparing internal transportation systems plans but recognizes that such activities should be coordinated with the activities of other contiguous and noncontiguous areas. The goals are to

- Work with local, state, and national elected and appointed officials to promote consideration and funding of regional transportation facilities;
- Conduct a feasibility study and corridor plan for the Carolinas Parkway;
- Develop a regional high investment plan;
- Develop a regional highway plan with DOTs, councils of government, and MPOs;
- Develop regional plans for airport facilities, public transportation service, rail service, and carpool-vanpool systems with cities and DOTs;
- Encourage and assist counties and cities in preparing and implementing coordinated thoroughfare plans;
- Identify and encourage the preservation of right-of-way for regional transportation facilities; and
- Monitor, report, and predict regional growth trends.

The source of the funds, organizational structure, and the specific activities of the compact were discussed at considerable length. The final structure selected for the CTC consists of two elected officials from each county, with votes and local funding proportional to population. Each state transportation agency has one representative. Initial proposals prepared by the university staff suggested funding be split between a staff and technical studies. The funding level was targeted at $225,000 a year. Members thought that the organization should start small and build capabilities as needed, beginning with just an executive director. An executive director was selected and began work in April 1991. In July 1991, the CTC "put some meat on its bones" (*8*). The members of the CTC approved an interlocal agreement between the counties to formalize the structure of the CTC, bylaws, and a work program for the coming year.

CURRENT CTC ACTIVITIES

The establishment of the CTC encouraged comprehensive regional planning and implementation within the area of the 13-member counties. For success, the CTC must cement itself as a viable regional transportation planning agency, both through its dealings with other agencies and through its own activities. To this end, the CTC is engaged in three major ongoing projects: an "outer-outer" belt feasibility study, a regional transportation authority feasibility and organizational study, and a railroad right-of-way preservation study. Other projects are in development.

Carolinas Parkway

The first of CTC's major projects deals with the feasibility and impacts of an outer-outer belt road through the outlying CTC counties. This belt is described as a second-tier ring road located 30 to 40 mi outside Charlotte (Figure 3). It is a second-tier road because Charlotte is currently constructing an outer belt within Mecklenburg County and is wrestling with proper alignment of that route (*9*). As an expression of the truly regional character of the outer-outer belt, it was named the Carolinas Parkway during an August 1990 meeting of the CTC.

From the beginning, the Carolinas Parkway project has served as the main galvanizing force of the CTC counties. Since the parkway will run through several outlying CTC counties, it is thought that benefits from the project will be spread around rather than serve only the interests of larger, more urban counties. In addition, planning for the parkway is truly regional as the local governments share in the future growth and development of the entire region. Finally, the circumferential design is more acceptable to the outlying counties as a group than would be a radial design with suburban nodes.

Progress has been steady on the Carolinas Parkway study. Up to this point, work has been conducted by research associates under the auspices of the Urban Institute at UNC Charlotte. Although the overall study deals with the feasibility and the effects of the parkway, work so far has concentrated on providing necessary input to those components. Specifically, researchers have conducted extensive data gathering, input, and analysis, which have culminated in traffic forecast models for the region (*10*). These will be used as inputs to the next stages of the project, the feasibility and impact studies.

The two state highway departments have begun a high-level feasibility study of the costs and benefits of the parkway. Calls for proposals for the feasibility study itself went out in March 1991, and a consultant was selected in July 1991. Estimates place the cost of the study at $500,000. This shows the willingness of the various participants to move forward with area megaprojects. It also shows that the state transportation agencies and the counties are comfortable with the role of the CTC, as they are now coming forward as partners in a major CTC project that should encourage continued progress.

Essentially, progress in the Carolinas Parkway project has been fast-paced. Beginning in August 1990, CTC staff developed the traffic models necessary to examine present and future regional traffic flows (*10*). Once proposals for the next stage are examined and a consulting team is chosen, CTC staff will continue to assist in location assessment and impact analyses of the project.

Regional Transportation Authority

The CTC is also studying the feasibility of establishing a two-state regional transportation authority (RTA). Both state transportation agencies have funded a feasibility study that began in the fall of 1991. This would allow local governments in the region the opportunity to decide the organizational and funding structure, as well as the type of service provided (*11*). As envisioned, the RTA would be similar to that recently legislated for the Research Triangle region of North Carolina and would plan for, fund, and perhaps operate future public transportation (transit) in the region.

At least five cities in the region provide intracity transit service, but there is little coordination of transit, even though there is significant evidence of intercity commuting, particularly from surrounding towns into Charlotte. What services do exist are mostly in the form of organized carpools and vanpools, although some shuttle buses have been attempted in the past. Now, someone commuting to work in Charlotte has almost no choice but to travel by car. For these reasons, regional service could become a reality soon in the next century (*12*). The RTA under consideration for the CTC region would examine the need for and plan for many types of services, including bus and eventually rail services.

To this point, most of the CTC's work on the RTA project has dealt with organizational issues related to such an authority. The CTC developed an "issues" brochure spelling out some of the major questions that must be addressed before creation of the RTA. These issues were discussed during a special forum held on the UNC Charlotte campus in October 1990. The issues discussed included the need for an RTA; governance and organization; geographic scope, powers, and services; special problems of a two-state RTA; and funding options. The last issue is of particular importance because it has already presented some problems for the Research Triangle Transportation Authority. The North Carolina Legislature did not provide operating funds for the Triangle authority until July 1991, even though legislature was passed to create the authority in 1989 (*13*).

The CTC has also conducted some preliminary needs analysis for an RTA. A rough cost estimate of service, based on general estimates of demand between cities, has allowed different service levels to be evaluated in terms of costs and revenues. This will become more important in the following months as the CTC goes through the necessary steps to have appropriate legislation passed in both the North Carolina and South Carolina legislatures and in Congress. With the Research Triangle RTA setting a precedent in North Carolina and a history of such agencies in South Carolina, passing in appropriate legislation should be direct. Clearly, continuation of the project will require more in-depth needs analysis, particularly as the RTA begins to plan services. The tasks completed on the RTA project have shown that more discussion and evaluation of the major issues are needed. The October 1990 forum did not create a consensus that an RTA was needed for the CTC region. Questions were raised about the need to create another level of government (*14*). This seemingly negative response can be explained in part by the fact that participants in the forum got caught up in discussion of funding and taxation issues. Clearly, the CTC must address these issues, but this should be considered separately from the need for an RTA. As one CTC executive committee member put it, "this region will mire up in its own mud if we don't work together and create other modes of transportation" (*15*). Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, along with Rock Hill, Gastonia, and York counties, have recently passed resolutions endorsing the CTC's efforts to conduct a feasibility study for an RTA.

Railroad Right-of-Way Preservation

The CTC's third major study deals with preserving existing railroad rights-of-way, an issue of increasing importance for many regions. Existing rights-of-way for corridors no longer used by the railroads are lost for future transportation use if they are converted back to other land uses by private interests. These rights-of-way could be very important to the public for use in any future rail transit or other transportation in the region.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission recommended in its *Generalized Land Use Plan 2005* that countywide transportation services be provided and in addition, mandated a study of light rail transit (LRT) (*16*). That study, conducted in 1989, concluded that transportation services should focus first on expanding bus service and then plan for LRT as a future possibility (*17*). These recommendations were based on current figures. However, the county could eventually require LRT as part of a viable regional transit system. Therefore, preserving existing rights-of-way is vital for future transit needs.

In keeping with its role as the center of the transportation region, Charlotte is progressing with preparations for LRT, partly through negotiations with NCDOT to share costs of acquiring rights-of-way (*18*). The state, with more explicit statutes for right-of-way acquisition, can be a more forceful negotiator; combining resources can allow more acquisition of rights-of-way.

Even with increased resources from the state, Charlotte can only negotiate for rights-of-way within the city limits and lobby for preservation of those just outside the city limits. The CTC provides an obvious forum for identifying and preserving those corridors for which there is not a county or MPO to assume a leadership role, or those that the state does not deem as strategic for preservation (L. Purnell, unpublished data, 1991). In addition, the CTC has become a leader in helping South Carolina establish a coordinated preservation effort. The executive director has been working with a South Carolina House subcommittee in drafting legislation for rail preservation.

In an attempt to achieve some of the tasks just outlined, the CTC is currently collecting data on existing railroad rights-of-way. It is hoped that these data can identify those corridors that are most strategic and, therefore, most important to preserve. The CTC is surveying existing rail lines in the region to include data on current mileage and abandoned mileage. Response rates to the survey were not good; a follow-up may be necessary.

Other Projects

While the three main projects of the CTC just discussed are already well under way, the CTC is planning additional proj-

ects. The CTC is developing a "vision document" that would spell out and demonstrate the region's future transportation characteristics. This document could be used as a comprehensive planning tool for the region's future transportation needs. A regional transportation plan is also scheduled to follow the vision document. In addition, the CTC is also interested in investigating the possibilities of "smart car" technologies in the CTC region. This represents the cutting edge of transportation technology and could be useful on a regional scale. A fourth possibility is the analysis of a cargo airport for the region. These are but four possible directions in which future CTC research may proceed, in addition to continuation of existing CTC activities and service to member governments.

Role of University

UNC Charlotte continues to play a support role for the CTC. UNC Charlotte, as a regional entity, provides a base for CTC activities. The CTC and its executive director are housed on campus, and the technical staff is provided through the university. In addition, the university provides facilities for larger CTC activities, such as meetings and the October RTA forum. The CTC has hired a permanent executive director to oversee CTC activities. The executive director provides the CTC with a leader to keep the regional transportation agenda on track and to act as a liaison between the various agencies involved in CTC-related interests.

EVALUATING CTC'S SUCCESS

Earlier papers outlined several necessary ingredients of a successful superregional transportation agency (*5*). These were put forth as informal guidelines for similar agencies:

- The need for pragmatism and compromise,
- The need for "champions,"
- The importance of galvanizing issues,
- The need for neutrality in the host agency,
- Support for other agencies,
- Issues of exclusivity and inclusivity,
- The need to select "real players."

It is possible, through examining these goals, to evaluate the CTC's success. Most of these goals have been met, at least to some extent, in the early part of the agenda.

The CTC continues to act as a forum for compromise for the various participants in the region. But, ". . . a rapid pace (as desired by the participants) simply could not be maintained, and a scale as broad as that initially perceived could not impose on the existing organizational structure" (*5*). The CTC is a tempered approach to regional transportation issues, but it still recognizes the needs of the various cities, counties, and other agencies involved. An example of this is the forum conducted on RTA issues. This type of discussion demonstrates the need to let all members be involved in the process yet clearly shows that not everyone will always agree.

The CTC clearly has champions. The activities of the CTC have gained fairly broad political support, partly through the active involvement of a recently elected North Carolina state senator, who stated at the RTA forum: "We cannot fail in the endeavor—we won't be able to compete in this country, much less globally, unless we create a working regional transportation authority" (*15*). At the same forum, the deputy secretary of NCDOT stated that the department "applauds the local efforts already begun and that the NCDOT is ready and willing to help" (*19*). In addition, funding support for CTC activities have come from the counties and both states, and both North Carolina and South Carolina are investing in the Carolinas Parkway feasibility study. The larger cities and counties have passed resolutions requesting that the CTC undertake the RTA feasibility study.

As another stated element of success, the CTC has become a very important galvanizing forum. The Carolinas Parkway continues to serve as a rallying point for CTC member counties and the state agencies. At the August 1990 meeting of the CTC, one observer stated that he had never seen such a large region (so many counties) work together on one issue so well. Again, from the beginning, the parkway has rendered service to member governments and has been supported strongly by all the CTC members.

In terms of "finding a supportive niche," the CTC continues to focus on supporting the roles of other agencies. The CTC's role is to advocate and plan regional transportation issues, not to take over the roles of other agencies already involved in transportation. For example, NCDOT clearly maintains the responsibility for planning and constructing roads in the state. The fact that the deputy secretary of NCDOT was so supportive of CTC efforts for an RTA indicates a general level of goodwill that would not exist had the CTC encroached upon the state's roles. Another aspect of the CTC's success hinges on its ability to select "real players." Hartgen and McCoy pointed out some initial problems with meeting attendance and dissemination of information (*4*).

This discussion has indicated the continued attempts by the CTC to maintain and improve the necessary ingredients for success. Even with the success mentioned, some problems still exist. These range from the different views on the need and funding for an RTA. Even with the problems mentioned, the CTC shows signs of being a successful approach to regional transportation planning. Most of the successful components are in place and functioning. The CTC has garnered broad political support and increasing public interest in the issues it presents, particularly the issues of regional transit and the Carolinas Parkway. Public support should increase as traffic and suburban ring growth continue to attract public attention. Partly because of this, the CTC and its activities have received excellent media coverage to promote the regional agenda.

In addition to champions in the legislature's influence, other groups are bringing the whole issue of regional topics to the forefront. For instance, the Urban Land Institute (*20*) pointed out that "the region should adopt a broad-based approach to transportation. Implementation of a regional transportation element is critical so that a regional distribution of employment and housing opportunities can occur." Finally, the work already completed on the major CTC projects and the hiring of an executive director, in conjunction with efforts to begin new research activities, suggest that the CTC is congealing into a viable and vital organization concerned with meeting regional transportation needs.

The future of the CTC looks bright. The CTC has now established a track record for advocating regional transportation through its past activities. The CTC plans to continue work on the major projects already discussed. In addition, plans for future projects are already under way, and the CTC will continue to try to meet the goals put forth in "Uncharted Waters" (*4*), particularly in regard to working with other agencies to create a truly regional approach to planning and implementing appropriate regional transportation.

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