

# Can Road Builders Join the Public in Influencing Transportation Policy?

## A Minnesota Case Study

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Tremendous changes are occurring in the formulation of transportation policy. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) is revolutionizing approaches to transportation programs, funding, and decision-making authority. These new policies, which emerged and survived against more traditional approaches, are indicators of long-term changes and forces that are affecting transportation in American society. Transportation constituency groups in particular have been affected, with new groups being formed that represent the public's growing influence. This change has been suggested by researchers calling for new coalitions and demonstrated by increased public leadership in transportation projects and the emergence of new voices and groups in transportation policy debates. One constituency group, The Minnesota Transportation Alliance, is examined to see how these forces have affected traditional transportation advocacy groups. The Alliance, formerly called Minnesota Good Roads, is transforming itself from a road builder organization to a broad-based public education and catalyst organization. It is attempting to bring together road builder groups and public representatives in a new coalition that will strengthen the position of transportation in its competition for attention and resources with other public issues. Whether or not it is successful remains to be seen, but its broad-based coalition and participation mechanisms may make it much more prepared for transportation challenges of the 1990s than are groups that are clinging to old traditions or making only small incremental changes.

In the past few years there have been tremendous changes in the formulation of transportation policy and the process of transportation decision making. The most visible indication of these changes is the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), which is revolutionizing approaches to transportation programs, funding, and decision-making authority. The Clean Air Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act also bring new directions to transportation planning and programs.

These new policies were influenced by several factors: changing constituency groups, individual leadership, budget constraints, and last-minute compromises. Although the mix of these factors during policy development influenced the final specifics of the acts, the nature of these policies and the fact that they emerged and survived against more traditional approaches are indicators of longer-term changes and forces in American society that are affecting transportation. The 1991

discussion and debate in Congress reflected similar discussions that have been occurring in states and communities throughout the country.

The focus of this paper is on the changing constituency groups that are influencing transportation decisions. The paper poses the thesis that road builders—the traditional alliance of FHWA, state departments of transportation (DOTs), local government engineers, and construction and supplier industry groups—were ultimately left behind in the ISTEA debate, and that the public—represented by new coalitions of transportation users, planners, and environmental groups—emerged in a leadership role in ISTEA development. Whether or not this is true will be seen during the implementation of ISTEA, but the point is that a shift is occurring. This shift has been suggested in surveys and studies, has been visible in community debates about transportation projects, and is now appearing in state and federal transportation policy development. Evidence of this shift is described below, with a special focus on coalition building in Minnesota.

### CALL FOR NEW COALITIONS

In 1988 the Eno Foundation for Transportation published a book by John Hazard, professor of marketing and transportation at Michigan State University, entitled *Managing National Transportation Policy (I)*. Hazard gives an extensive description and analysis of transportation policy in the United States and reviews the performance of the U.S. DOT (established in 1966) during its first two decades of existence.

In his section on constituent groups, Hazard outlines the increasingly divided constituencies for the U.S. DOT. Before the U.S. DOT was established, initial policies were influenced largely by commercial carrier associations (American Trucking Associations, Association of American Railroads, etc.) that worked directly through their modal administrations. National policy became more complex in the 1960s as social issues came to the fore, the U.S. DOT assumed urban transit responsibilities, and the common carriers industry declined. Hazard outlines three alternatives for future constituency support that the secretary of the U.S. DOT could pursue: (a) continue zigzagging between various constituency groups to find coalitions conceived to be in the public interest; (b) retrieve the active support of carrier groups, leaving equity and external issues to other agencies; and (c) seek out rising constituencies of travelers and shippers as consumers and support

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their broad interests in economically efficient service as a surrogate for public interest in transportation.

Hazard clearly prefers the third alternative, focusing on broad-based traveler-shipper consumer constituencies—in other words, on transportation users rather than on transportation producers. He believes that this would result in better-coordinated intermodal services, better long-range planning, increased research and development, and so on—many of which are echoed in the ISTEA language written 3 years after his book.

Another author who has called for new coalitions to influence transportation policy is Nancy Rutledge Connery, former executive director of the National Council on Public Works Improvement. She is eloquent in stating how important the infrastructure is to each person and their community and how the interdependence, mutual accountability, and obligations as humans, citizens, and public works professionals must be recognized (2). She is frustrated with the preoccupation of road-builder coalitions simply to find more money and with the common tendency to equate quality of life to greater mobility rather than linking it also to the places in which people work and live.

Connery believes that transportation problems would be better addressed if a broader range of people were brought into public investment decisions, so that public works problems were no longer defined in a vacuum separated from users, operators, and places. She calls for earlier citizen participation to ensure that public investments are understood and supported by the public as well as the experts, and so that the experts do not view the public as a vague enemy when it comes to getting something built. She observes that broad-based collaboration is becoming an important tool in upgrading manufacturing competitiveness and revitalizing public education and believes that infrastructure, the third leg of the foundation of America's economic future, is no less important.

There have been surveys indicating that American citizens may agree with writers such as Hazard and Connery. A national survey in 1989 by Apogee Research for AASHTO found that the public is not happy with their highway and mass transit network (3). Although safety, congestion, and road conditions were the leading problems mentioned, the perceived efficiency of the state DOT was the most important factor in explaining satisfaction with the highway system. The public appeared to be interested in better planning and was more likely to have strong negative feelings than strong positive feelings about state DOT efficiency, with a high degree of mistrust over how transportation dollars were spent. This survey and others suggest that the traditional coalitions, which were so effective in the development and construction of the U.S. transportation system, are losing the support of the public and that, unless the old groups change, new coalitions will take leadership roles that respond to the public concerns.

#### EXAMPLES OF SHIFT IN LEADERSHIP

The call for user coalitions and public involvement by Hazard and Connery and the attitudes documented by the Apogee survey are not new. As Hazard points out, the explosion of social issues in the 1960s led to the development of new con-

stituency groups that were often opposed to transportation development processes. Many highway projects around the country have been slowed, modified, and even stopped by community opposition. Many state DOTs and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) have responded with creative, successful public involvement efforts. What is happening today, however, is a radical change, in which traditional coalitions and approaches are not changing rapidly enough. In many cases new groups are taking the lead, in both project development and policy formulation.

#### Project Development

Changes in public attitudes can first be seen in community reactions to transportation projects. There are many examples of projects that have been changed by public involvement. As Gattis and Stoner find in their research on public attitudes about the creation of frontage roads (4), engineers and planners can be expected to have views and concerns that are significantly different from those of businesses and neighborhoods that may be affected by engineering and planning decisions required for frontage roads. When transportation professionals are not aware of or do not prepare for and deal with these fundamental differences in values and perspectives, tension and conflict will result. Many transportation agencies have come a long way in understanding this situation and in implementing participation mechanisms that mitigate conflict. However, these incremental changes are not keeping up with the rising concerns about transportation. Two project examples are described that show radical changes in project development.

In 1984 a study was begun for a new roadway connecting Wilmington to Dover in Delaware. The roadway had been the subject of serious controversy over a period of almost 30 years. Increasing traffic congestion and rising accident rates led to three major studies for a bypass in 1958, 1967, and 1974. Each of these three previous studies took the conventional process of alternatives development on the basis of traffic and engineering consideration, followed by public hearings. Each time, the opposition from farmers, businesses, and residents stopped the proposed project. Alvarez et al. (5) describe the approach that finally led to construction of an alternative. This approach turned the traditional process on its head, structured so that the community involvement effort itself drove the engineering design work. The process was based on the premise that every articulated concern warranted attention and that all aspects of the rationale for design decisions should be made clear. Public coalitions helped create and evaluate alternatives, with Delaware DOT (DelDOT) engineers providing data and analysis. Many outreach meetings, surveys, newsletters, project exhibits, slide shows, and individual contacts were employed. Enough consensus was achieved to have environmental impact statements completed and a selected alternative announced 2 years after the study began. Construction began 5 years after the study was started.

In this example, the radical change was in the process, not in leadership. DelDOT, by relinquishing some of its authority and becoming more of a facilitator, actually increased its effectiveness as a leader. It took advantage of the strong user attitudes and formed an alliance with the public to effectively

solve a transportation problem. Not many agencies have been willing to be this creative, although perhaps they have not had DelDOT's 30 years of frustration.

A second example demonstrates a shift in leadership as well as in process. Described by Hartgen and McCoy (6), the setting for this example is Charlotte, North Carolina, which is at the crossroads of Interstates and other key highways. This is a growing metropolitan area that includes counties in both North and South Carolina. Planning organization roles and responsibilities are disjointed, with multiple DOTs, Councils of Government, and MPOs. In 1985 an ad hoc group called the Carolinas Counties Coalition was formed to pursue regional agendas for the Charlotte metropolitan area and surrounding counties. It quickly identified transportation access as one of its critical issues and generated considerable interest in a second-tier ring road around Charlotte. Ultimately, it formed a transportation task force consisting of elected officials, business representatives, and staff from nine counties, who defined their mission as an advocate for transportation investments as well as a multimodal planning organization. The task force undertook project efforts to study the feasibility of the ring road, a regional transit authority, and rail right-of-way preservation and decided to hire an executive director to be housed at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

In this example, the traditional groups that have initiated transportation projects—state DOTs and MPOs—were in a secondary role. In addition, the initial reaction of the two DOTs was one of caution and reluctance, having started their own regional planning efforts for the Charlotte area. Ultimately, they became full partners of the task force and supported the task force efforts; still, this is a case in which a new coalition took the lead because of the lack of response to the growing transportation issues perceived by the public. This is only one of many examples across the country in which this shift in leadership, in defining and advocating transportation projects, has occurred.

### Transportation Policy

As they become more widespread, the increasing interest and power of the public in influencing transportation projects ultimately affect transportation policy as well. Local groups that have initiated or changed projects join forces, realizing that they all may gain by influencing the formulation of policy: the state and federal transportation programs, regulations, and funding allocations. It is unclear whether there has been the kind of dramatic shift in leadership for transportation policy as there has been in some communities for transportation projects, but there are clearly new voices and evidence that many people feel as Hazard and Connery do in calling for, and building, new coalitions.

One of the most dynamic places currently for transportation debate is California. The transportation problems are critical: congestion, safety, and air pollution. In the San Francisco Bay Area, traffic congestion has been at or near the top as the most serious metropolitan concern in citizen surveys—above crime, education, taxes, and other concerns that usually outrank transportation in other metropolitan areas. A collection of articles published by the California Institute of

Public Affairs in 1990, *The Alternative to Gridlock* (7), is an indicator of the new voices that have entered the California transportation debate. Business leaders, environmentalists, and university faculty, as well as government leaders, offer their ideas or solutions. California has also led the way in new methods of financing roads and has experimented with growth management, often initiated by local governments. It is not clear whether one coalition has risen above others in influencing transportation policy, but it is clear that the traditions of other states—gas tax increases influenced by road-builder groups—are no longer workable in California. The public—the transportation users—is demanding a role in setting new transportation directions. Recently, the newly formed San Francisco Bay Area Partnership, a unique intergovernmental and intermodal transportation consortium, has received acclaim for responding to these needs (8).

At the national level, a new coalition has risen to a leadership role: the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP). By 1991, STPP had grown into an organization whose defined policy goals were supported by over 100 organizations representing a broad spectrum of conservation, environment, planning, transportation, energy, and urban interests (9). The STPP is an advocate of public involvement and certainly could be described as a surrogate for the public—a type of user coalition called for by Hazard and Connery. It is interesting to examine STPP's impact on ISTEA, especially since many of STPP's policy proposals were incorporated into ISTEA. The development of ISTEA was influenced by the efforts of U.S. DOT Secretary Skinner to create a national transportation policy and by efforts from a coalition led by AASHTO, the Highway Users Federation, and others to develop a vision called Transportation 2020. These efforts were dominated by traditional groups that have influenced transportation policy in the past. There were certainly new ideas in their efforts—to call them road builders is too narrow—but it is fascinating to see how much impact a new group such as STPP had on ISTEA compared with the impacts of these older, powerful constituency groups. Some observers of ISTEA development will say that Senator Moynihan and his staff were primarily responsible for reversing the more traditional directions. But Senator Moynihan's leadership was supported by his colleagues, whose votes very well could have been reflections of the changing attitudes and rising concerns of the public about the need for new transportation directions.

These examples show that shifts of leadership are occurring in transportation at local, state, and national levels. It is difficult to judge which groups have more power or how shifts will occur in the future. But these shifts have implications for transportation agencies, for existing constituency groups, and for new groups that have transportation interests. One type of constituency group—state coalitions that advocate for transportation—is examined in this paper to see how it is being affected by these changes.

### STATE TRANSPORTATION CONSTITUENCY GROUPS

Several states have information and advocacy groups that historically have worked closely with state DOTs and industry groups to influence transportation funding legislation. These

groups are usually nonprofit organizations controlled by boards that traditionally have been dominated by road-builder representatives, with significant financing coming from the construction industry. There are several models; some are described below.

- *California.* Californians for Better Transportation is primarily a public information organization that recently has focused on environmental issues.

- *Florida.* Floridians for Better Transportation works to raise public awareness about transportation issues.

- *Georgia.* Georgians for Better Transportation is currently promoting a campaign in support of multimodal transportation in Georgia.

- *Maine.* Maine Better Transportation Association (MBTA) was organized in 1939 as a statewide association of the various interests that constitute Maine's transportation industry. The primary mission of the MBTA is to improve public understanding of the importance of Maine's transportation system.

- *Minnesota.* Minnesota Transportation Alliance conducts programs in advocacy and lobbying, information and communication, and citizen and organization action.

- *Missouri.* Missouri Development Association concentrates mostly on public and media relations, helping the state DOT communicate its message.

- *Pennsylvania.* Pennsylvania Highway Information Association is one of the oldest transportation advocate associations. It is not a lobbying group but was instrumental in the development of the toll road buy-back process that was ultimately included in ISTEA.

- *Virginia.* Virginia Road and Transportation Builders Association recently has been involved in the beginning stages of creating a coalition to pursue increased funding for transportation rather than hold to its historical position of solely supporting highway funding.

- *Wisconsin.* Transportation Development Association (TDA) has identified as its primary goal the establishment and maintenance of a balanced transportation network that meets Wisconsin's present and future mobility needs in the most efficient and effective manner possible. TDA's mission is education. As a nonlobbying entity, the association's prime responsibility is to disseminate credible information on Wisconsin transportation, on the state's current and future mobility needs, and on appropriate solutions to those needs.

To judge how the changes and shifts in influence described above are affecting these organizations, the evolution over the past few years of one of these organizations—Minnesota Transportation Alliance—is examined in more detail.

## MINNESOTA TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE

### Reorganization in Minnesota

Almost 100 years ago, in 1893, bicyclists and farmers were leaders in protesting the muddy conditions of Minnesota's roads. Their actions led to the formation of a citizens' organization named Minnesota Good Roads, Inc. (MGRI). This group grew into the largest organization in the state concerned with transportation issues. It became influential as a lobbyist

in helping pass gas tax and other state funding legislation. Over time, its core financial supporters were members of the construction industry and Minnesota counties, whose board members were often elected on the basis of their ability to acquire funding for roads.

MGRI worked closely with the state highway department, which became the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) in 1976, on legislative funding packages. Often, a small circle consisting of legislative committee chairpersons, Mn/DOT officials, and interest group leaders, including the executive director of MGRI, developed highway funding language and formulas that were passed with few changes. In the debates of formula allocations, MGRI competed directly with transit interest groups, protecting highway dollars from being used for transit.

In the late 1980s, the MGRI board of directors faced two challenges. One was the retirement of MGRI's long-time executive director. The second was a realization that the old way of doing business—working with a close-knit group of leaders—was not as effective as it used to be. Newly elected legislators demanded a better understanding of how transportation decisions were made, particularly during a time of budget constraints and federal cutbacks. It also became more difficult to separate highway needs from transit needs, and there was concern that this historical conflict was weakening the overall transportation position in its competition for attention and resources with other public issues such as education and health.

The board believed that MGRI needed a stronger emphasis on public education to help create broader-based support for transportation. It hired a new executive director to implement this direction. Focus group sessions were conducted to determine the types of activities that would be most valuable for MGRI. During these sessions and board meeting discussions, many members proposed that MGRI be renamed to reflect a broader perspective. Although there was no consensus on this, in 1989 the organization was renamed the Minnesota Transportation Alliance to reflect expanded concerns and purposes. The renamed organization established four regional chapters and expanded communication efforts. New members were recruited for the chapters and the board of directors to broaden support for the alliance, bringing in new interest group members such as transit and neighborhood associations. Surveys were conducted of all members to determine the legislative priorities for the alliance, and participation mechanisms were implemented so that regional concerns throughout the state could work their way up for action by the board of directors.

### Alliance Policy Task Force

As the transportation alliance began to be active in the Minnesota legislative process, there were concerns that the new directions of the organization were not widely understood. It was perceived by some, particularly in the media, as a road-builder organization with a new name. Others, including some of its contributing members, questioned whether it was losing its focus as it became involved in transit issues. This uncertainty came during a period when transportation was beginning to receive increased attention at both the state and na-

tional levels. A Minnesota transportation study board had been established to recommend funding and policy directions to the Minnesota legislature, and U.S. DOT and AASHTO had begun preparing for the transportation reauthorizations due in 1991 in Congress. The alliance needed to participate and respond to these efforts.

Early in 1990, the executive director and the executive committee decided to establish a policy task force that would help prepare the alliance for its involvement in these state and national activities. Its charge was to identify a policy framework and strategic direction for the alliance that could be discussed and adopted by the board of directors and communicated widely to members and interested parties.

Determining what groups would be represented on the task force was a strategic decision because it would be an indicator of the coalition the new organization was trying to build. Seven members were selected in addition to the executive director, as follows:

- An official from the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce,
- The leader of a Minneapolis neighborhood organization that was active in transportation and environmental issues,
- A rural county engineer,
- A retired highway construction executive,
- The former president of the Minnesota Public Transit Association,
- A transportation consultant, and
- A rural community leader who was an advocate for improved transportation from her community to the Twin Cities.

Three members of this task force were from what could be called the road-builder coalition that formerly supported MGRI: the county engineer, construction executive, and transportation consultant. Three other members came from what in this paper has been called the public as users and consumers of transportation—representing Minnesota businesses, urban neighborhoods, and rural communities. The final member represented transit, a group of transportation providers that had not been previously active in the organization. This group met three times in 1990, assisted by an external facilitator, to prepare recommendations for the alliance board of directors.

### Recommended Strategic Directions

The task force produced a report of recommendations for the board of directors that presented a new mission for the alliance, a philosophy, policy concerns, recommended programs, and three strategic issue areas that needed to be addressed (10). Although there was a great deal of discussion and revision in the preparation of this document, the task force reached consensus and appeared to have a high level of ownership for the product of their efforts. The new mission recommended was as follows:

The mission of The Minnesota Transportation Alliance is to ensure an effective statewide transportation system for Minnesota. The alliance addresses issues for all modes of transportation through the leadership and active involvement of a broad-based membership. (10)

This mission was reinforced through the other recommendations of the task force. The philosophy emphasized an integrated, multimodal transportation system and the active building of coalitions. The programs recommended include (a) advocacy and lobbying with a special emphasis on transportation funding, carrying on the historical strength of the organization; (b) acting as a resource for information, emphasizing communication and education through publications, meetings, and events; and (c) citizen and organization action, acting as a catalyst through four regional chapters to build coalitions and attract new individuals and groups to address transportation issues.

The policy concerns and strategic issue areas identified by the task force distinguished between defining what an effective transportation system is for the state versus ensuring that there are the means available to attain that effective system. The task force believed that the organization had historically emphasized the means—funding—with little comment on what the transportation system should be or do (similar to Conner's concerns). It defined four elements of an effective transportation system:

- Personal mobility and access so that citizens can effectively perform the employment, family, and social activities that contribute to the quality of their lives. The need for access to jobs, housing, education, shopping, health care, and recreation was identified.
- Transportation support of the economy so that the economic competitiveness of Minnesota is enhanced. Multiple industries were identified that need access to suppliers, markets, and labor through efficient transportation systems.
- Transportation support of state and community goals so that community services (fire and police protection, etc.) are effectively provided and transportation services are available to all citizens, including elderly, disabled, and lower-income populations.
- Transportation system characteristics that ensure that Minnesota's transportation system is safe, well planned, well designed, environmentally sensitive, aesthetically pleasing, intermodal, and accessible.

In terms of the means to an effective transportation system, the task force identified three priorities:

- Transportation funding that is adequate, long term, stable, user oriented, and innovative;
- Institution/agency roles that clearly define authority and responsibilities and that link transportation to other state and local goals; and
- Transportation decision-making principles that set high standards for involving the public, planning, protecting the environment, innovation, developing the economy, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and expertise.

The task force recommended that the alliance monitor these seven policy concerns to identify strategic issues that the organization should address through its programs. Potential actions could range from simply providing information about an issue to developing an active lobbying campaign. In addition, the task force identified the internal organization of the alliance as a strategic issue area, recommending that the

board ensure that there is agreement on the new mission, develop a membership strategy, evaluate the committee structure, develop program priorities, and establish long-term financing strategies.

### Current Status

The Minnesota Transportation Alliance continues to proceed in the directions established by the policy task force in its September 1990 report. The report was adopted by the board of directors and used as a framework for presentations and discussion at the alliance's annual meeting that fall.

The transition to the new organization and new mission has not been instantaneous. There continues to be some uncertainty by traditional members about the role and effectiveness of the new organization. But clearly there have been some successes. The four regional chapters have created a new awareness of the various transportation needs throughout the state. New members have joined these chapters, which offer them forums to address local concerns. Mechanisms have been implemented that allow leaders of the chapters to become board members, bringing new perspectives and a grass-roots component to the organization. This program emphasis has created a new network of contacts that allows the alliance to be up-to-date on public concerns and issues. The two-way communication between the board and the regions has increased the understanding of statewide issues and helped point the Alliance in responsive directions as it prepares its positions for the legislature and Congress.

One result of this increased awareness was the alliance's success in being a sounding board for the Minnesota congressional delegation as ISTEA language was being debated and developed. The annual alliance trip to Washington, D.C., provided members direct access to the delegation, resulting in new information for the delegation that was used in their shaping of ISTEA. Another result of the broader involvement of the alliance was that traditional construction industry members used the alliance to help address their own transportation problems. An aggregate company, for example, has used the alliance's influence to address water transportation issues for barge shipments on the Mississippi River.

The alliance faces challenges, however, in maintaining effective relationships. With a more diverse membership, it runs risks in taking positions that a segment of its membership opposes. Its more effective role may often be that of a catalyst—a group that raises awareness and keeps processes going—as opposed to an advocate. It has had challenges, for example, in defining its role in the expansion debate for Interstate 35W in Minneapolis in which neighborhood groups, light-rail advocates, and proponents for increasing the number of highway lanes are involved in an intense discussion about the future of that corridor.

The alliance also faces challenges in its relationship with Mn/DOT. Formerly, MGRI was often an agent of Mn/DOT, taking positions that Mn/DOT, a public agency, could not take as effectively. Mn/DOT also counted on MGRI to help develop legislative and other support for Mn/DOT proposals. The alliance, by trying to be responsive to its diverse membership, may at times appear to be at odds with Mn/DOT.

The alliance also still faces challenges in the Minnesota legislature. While most legislators perceive the alliance to be a credible voice on transportation issues, there still are some who do not believe it has broadened beyond being a road-builder organization. Although the alliance has been one of the few voices to put forth new ideas, no transportation policy legislation has been passed since the alliance began working towards its new mission. In the 1992 legislative session, for example, the alliance proposed the establishment of a multimodal mobility fund, a concept that had the support of both road-builder and transit groups. The Minnesota Senate supported a bill establishing this fund, but the Minnesota House did not schedule the proposed legislation for a hearing.

There has been some concern about the financial support for the alliance. A few traditional members have drifted away; it is unknown whether this was caused by concerns over the alliance's new direction or by the pressures of the recession. New members, however, have joined since the mission was broadened. The membership is still evolving, and it is too early to predict the results. Currently 30 percent of the members are counties and cities (usually represented by engineers); 50 percent are members of the construction and supplier industry, labor unions, and professional engineer associations; and 20 percent are users of the transportation system and nonhighway modes—businesses, community groups, transit, carriers, and citizens. There are positive signs in the vitality of the new members and in the apparent adoption by these and other members of the task force's recommendations. The words used by the task force keep reappearing in recommendations by regional chapters and in board discussions. The alliance leadership believes that with time and patience the organization is going to grow in membership and influence.

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The evolution undergone by the Minnesota Transportation Alliance has been affected by similar forces that brought about ISTEA, led to the formation of STPP, and caused the emergence of the Carolinas Counties Coalition transportation initiative. The changes in American society, the growing concerns about transportation problems, and the perceived lack of response by traditional transportation organizations have led to new groups and new directions that are influenced a great deal by the public, the users of the transportation system.

When one thinks about how transportation decisions were made a few years ago, these are remarkable changes. Although it is uncertain what the end results of these changes will be, it seems that organizations such as the alliance, which are trying to adapt to this new environment, are ahead of those that are clinging to traditional roles and mechanisms. Compared with transportation advocacy and information groups in other states, the alliance is unique in the breadth of its three integrated programs and in its mix of membership. It has both strengths and weaknesses; but it is making midcourse corrections, building a strong network, and taking a patient and optimistic approach in developing capabilities to respond to future challenges. Hartgen and McCoy use the words "uncharted waters" in the title for their paper on the Carolinas Counties Coalition, words that are appropriate in describing

the evolution of the alliance. Many organizations are sailing in these waters today, but, as Connery points out, broad-based collaboration can provide direction and vision. The alliance, although facing challenges, seems well positioned to deal with the transportation needs of the public in the 1990s.

The question posed in the title—Can road builders join the public in influencing transportation policy?—does not have a clear answer. Regarding the case study in this paper, although the Alliance seems well positioned and its new funding proposals have found support in the Minnesota Senate, so far no consensus has been developed that has resulted in new transportation policy for Minnesota. There are obstacles to building this type of partnership. The lack of national unity present in the ISTEA development is also present in Minnesota and other states. Transit and environmental groups are often suspicious of road-builder organizations; and road-builder groups that advocate increased highway funding often do so without an understanding of the overall transportation system and without working with other groups that increasingly care about this system. However, the Minnesota Transportation Alliance is one of the few forums in which road builders and public representatives are actively being joined together to bring forth new ideas and to work toward building consensus. It is still an experiment, but a clear rationale was provided by the Alliance Policy Task Force: this direction should ultimately benefit the industry by building coalitions that make transportation more competitive with other public issues.

The changes described in these examples have implications for government transportation agencies. The agencies that will be successful in the 1990s are those that provide the best service to their user constituencies—the public—as called for by John Hazard. State DOTs and MPOs cannot afford to learn the hard way about the strong feelings the public has about the transportation system. Public involvement that drives transportation decisions, as DelDOT finally used to solve its bypass problem, must increase to build the successful coalitions needed today to address critical transportation issues. Creative organizations will take advantage of strong public opinions and benefit from new alliances that help them get needed resources, alliances that conceivably could be even more powerful than the road-builder coalitions of the past.

## SUMMARY

Changes in transportation are occurring at a rapid rate. These changes are affecting constituency groups, leading to the formation of new groups and directions. The experience of the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, which is attempting to bring public constituencies together with road-builder groups, may provide a useful approach for dealing with these changes. Whether or not it is successful remains to be seen, but the broad-based coalitions being formed and the participation and communication being provided are indicators of a promising future and also potential models for transportation agencies.

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