

APPENDIX A

Highlights from 1994 Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting Sessions on 1990 Census

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The following is a summary of the major discussion topics from CTPP—Products and Applications (Session 190A) and Data Needs—A Look to the Future (Session 190B) of the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board (TRB). It was prepared as a presentation to the National Conference on Decennial Census Data for Transportation Planning, Irvine, California, for the following purposes:

1. To lend consistency and continuity between the TRB sessions and the conference,
2. To provide a broader base of support for consensus recommendations for the 2000 census when considered in conjunction with the conference, and
3. To provide an opportunity to document input from presentations made by participants at the TRB sessions.

The comments that follow are posed more as questions or discussion points than conclusions. The points raised at the TRB sessions are, however, similar and add support to the recommendations contained in this proceedings.

It was difficult to condense 3½ hr of presentations and discussion into a short overview and, thus, the material from the TRB sessions has been filtered to arrive at the most critical points in the view of the author. It also includes some of the author's interpretations and observations.

THEMES

There were four major themes throughout the two sessions. The following list is in no particular order of priority, nor is there any attempt to follow the order of the TRB agenda. The themes were as follows:

1. Application: problems and solutions,
2. Local perspective and implications for the user,
3. A view from the other side, and
4. Adapting to change.

Application: Problems and Solutions

Both positive and not so positive aspects to application were apparent from the discussion. On the negative side, for example, it was clear that few, if any, applications of the statewide Parts A, B, and C had been accomplished by the time of the TRB sessions. The statewide package had been out since April/May (8 months at TRB time). Also 37 sessions of the Census Transportation Planning Package (CTPP) training course had been presented by the Federal Highway Administration to more than 1,200 users across the nation since early 1991. Yet, no one in the audience or that we could find (except for Ron Tweedie and Chuck Purvis) had used the package. Why was this? Several reasons were voiced, among them the following:

- The package is too hard to use in the media distributed by the Census Bureau (nine-track tape),
- The CTPP for state use is new, and
- States assumed that the package was purchased for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and did not want to process it.

Although not explicitly raised at the TRB sessions, these reasons pose a critical question: Is the wrong message (of apparent noninterest) being sent to the Bureau of the Census and the Office of Management and Budget?

The problem with distribution of CTPP on nine-track tapes was discussed with an implied question: How to do better next time? The CD-ROMs developed by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics had just become available. To some users, nine-track tape is an old medium; desk-top computers are easier to use and there is no "corporate knowledge" of mainframes available on state or MPO staffs. To other users it is easier to work with the extremely large files of the CTPP (MTC's Part 3 is 260 MB). This assumes that states or MPOs have programmers or someone with knowledge of SPSS or SAS on staff.

On the more positive side, a recent survey conducted by George Wickstrom indicated state use (or planned use) of the 1990 CTPP to be double that of the 1980 Urban Transportation Planning Package.

Local Perspective and Implications for the User

Despite the value of the census, it was recognized that it provides only part of the data needed for transportation planning, particularly for model updates. Supplemental surveys are needed, such as automobile use surveys or home interview, truck, and taxi surveys, to obtain a complete picture of travel in the region. In the broadest context, states and MPOs need to know what data they have and what data they need. They may have to perform a complete inventory of data sources, availability, and their relevance to transportation planning. George Wickstrom reported on such an inventory done for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

There is continual need for MPO and state involvement in and support for the census program. For example, the census block-traffic zone equivalency development program required close coordination between the future CTPP data users and the Census Bureau. More of this close cooperation is needed. The question was raised, however: Will the Census Bureau continue this close association? The possibility that the Census Bureau will abandon its "grass roots" association with the users was of real concern to the audience.

Concern was expressed about the methodological reform for the 2000 census and what this will mean for transportation planning. States and MPOs need to be heard before decisions are made about census methods and content.

A need was expressed for "heads up" alerts to the states and MPOs when relevant topics are about to appear in the *Federal Register* or other media where the content will affect the users or users are being asked to supply input (e.g., census proposals).

In the general transportation data context, data users and suppliers need to develop and maintain good coordination. In particular, attitudes against data sharing need to loosen up.

There are many data sources at local governments and agencies, and these need to be tapped. This carries with it, however, the need to establish compatibility among local and regional data formats and content.

Coordination is needed between the states, their MPOs, and local governments and others in making data available. For example, Chuck Purvis reported on an aggressive outreach program that MTC has for disseminating census products.

View from the Other Side

Susan Miscura provided the Census Bureau perspective and a preview of plans for the 2000 census. The Census Bureau has an interest in accuracy but a mandate to hold costs down. The 1990 census cost \$2.6 billion. The cost of the same type of census for 2000 is estimated at \$4 billion or more. Twenty percent of the cost of the 1990 census was attributable to collecting and tabulating data beyond that needed for apportionment and redistricting. This has implications for the content and methodology that the Census Bureau may use in the 2000 census.

A critical concern of the Census Bureau is how to improve the accuracy of the census count. The Census Bureau will be focusing on methodology, sampling, and statistical estimation to improve accuracy. The 1995 test will focus on methodology; choice of questions (content) will be considered later.

Several questions at the TRB session concerned how real the methodological change is. One, for example, asked: "Is the Census Bureau budget sufficient to test alternative designs?" This year the Census Bureau reallocated resources. It is unclear for future years.

One comment from the user community placed the cost burden in perspective. If there is no journey-to-work question in the 2000 census, the cost of obtaining this information will be shifted

- To other federal agencies if federally supported,
- To other levels of government (states/MPOs) if pooled funded, or
- To other programs (SPR funds) for home interview surveys or NPTS add-ons.

Alternatively, the cost could be deferred to later years or not collected at all. So there may not be a net savings, but there likely will be a net increase in cost.

Adapting to Change and External Forces

One of the most far-reaching provisions of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 is the requirement of conformity between transportation plans and programs and the state implementation plan for attaining air quality standards. Air quality conformity is a driving force behind the need for good travel data and models.

Do census data have a role in transportation planning for air quality analysis? Do external forces and institutions have a stake in the census? If so, do they know it? For example, does the Environmental Protection Agency realize that, at least indirectly, it should have an interest in the success of the census as a key data source for transportation planning—and, thus, air quality planning?

Consideration is being given by the Census Bureau to alternative methods of collecting data: matrix sampling and continuous measurement. This will affect the methods used by states and MPOs for applications of the census data.

Questions for the 2000 census have been categorized into four groups: (a) required by law from a decennial census, (b) required by other agencies from the decennial census but can come from a sample, (c) estimates required by other agency statutes that the Census Bureau has determined would best be filled by a sample of the decennial census questionnaires, and (d) questions asked in 1990 for which there is no federal legislation to require their collection. The

journey-to-work and place-of-work questions are currently in the third category. What are the chances that this category, or parts of this category, will not be included in the next census?

CONCLUSION

The Census Bureau is going about “designing a different census.” Change will undoubtedly come—the question now is how can the states and MPOs react and plan for it.

- What will the 2000 census include for transportation planning?
- What method will be used to collect it?
- Will the data be comparable with data from past decennial censuses?
- What is the best way for states and MPOs to adapt to the new methodology?

These are the questions raised or implied at the TRB Annual Meeting sessions on the 1990 census and the questions that participants at this national conference had to address.