

Introductory Remarks

Arthur B. Sossiau

The National Conference on Decennial Census Data for Transportation Planning, jointly sponsored by the Transportation Research Board and the Federal Highway Administration, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, the Research and Special Programs Administration, and the Office of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation, was organized to discuss and share experiences in the uses of the 1980 census data, which have been considerable, and to make recommendations that will help the 1990 census be even more responsive to the needs of transportation planners.

As those who have tried to gather information know, the quality of the information depends on the precision of the questions asked. From the standpoint of the transportation planner, the census is doing much better in this regard than it used to. One of the reasons for this conference was to help the Census Bureau ask questions that provide information that is useful to transportation professionals.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has developed training materials to encourage the use of census data. So far these include the Transportation Planners' Guide to Using the 1980 Census, Case Studies for Applying the Urban Transportation Planning Package in Transportation Modeling, and Technical Brief: Linking the UTPP with UTPS and Microcomputers. In addition, FHWA has conducted one- and three-day training sessions.

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are finding the data especially useful in three applications: to evaluate the transportation situation in 1980 and to help understand trends that extend from 1960 through 1980; to update, calibrate, and validate transportation prediction models; and to support constituent agencies with data that are necessary to guide their transportation policy decisions.

The first session in the conference explored the expectations for the transportation and place-of-work data provided by the 1980 census. The session, which is presented in Part II of this report, featured several papers, including two presentations by Bureau of the Census personnel about their 1980-related activities and services. This was followed by a session based on first-hand experiences in the use of the 1980 census data in which brief presentations indicated the range of applications for such data. These papers are given in Part III.

The basic work of the conference was conducted in six workshops:

1. Statewide Transportation Planning and Coordination, chaired by Richard S. Glaze, Florida Department of Transportation;
2. Transportation Planning in Large Metropolitan Areas, chaired by Gordon A. Shunk, North Central Texas Council of Governments;
3. Transportation Planning in Small Metropolitan Areas, chaired by Larry R. Goode, North Carolina Department of Transportation;
4. Transit and Traffic Analysis, chaired by Maurice Carter, San Diego, California;

5. Private-Sector Applications in Planning and Marketing, chaired by Rube Diamond, Southern California Association of Governments; and
6. Travel Research, chaired by Joseph L. Schofer, Northwestern University.

After the workshops had met once, the entire group was reconvened for a presentation by senior census officials on plans for the 1990 census, which forms Part IV, and a panel discussion of how current needs for transportation and workplace data will change or remain the same through the end of the 20th century and what those needs mean for the 1990 census, which is included in Part V. Then the workshops met again to discuss user needs and the 1990 census, including implications of census plans, alternatives to census data, implications of needs for census products, implications for the cost of the 1990 census, methods for meeting the costs, and roles of state and local agencies in acquiring and using the 1990 census data.

The workshops were asked to draft specific recommendations for the 1990 census in the following categories:

- Content of the questionnaire;
- Sample size and procedures;
- Geographic coding;
- Content and media of data products;
- Comparability among products of the decennial census, the economic census, and other census products; and
- Institutional and administrative concerns.

The workshop chairmen's reports and a summary of the findings and recommendations are included in Part V. It is intended that these proceedings provide the findings and recommendations of the conference and express the needs of the transportation community relative to the 1990 census.