

Workshop Reports

Statewide Transportation Planning and Coordination

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Statewide planning is predominantly a policy-level activity and therefore is not a heavy user of detailed census data. The data are primarily used for technical activities rather than for program planning or fund allocation. Among valuable general state uses of the data are long-term trend analysis and comparative analysis of similar parts of a state. Because of continuing suburban and exurban growth, there is a growing need for regional and interregional transportation planning that will require data at levels consistent with the level of detail required for urbanized-area transportation planning. Among the interesting applications of the data, the following were mentioned:

- Connecticut used the data to plan diversion of traffic during Interstate reconstruction.
- Michigan has used the data to recalibrate statewide models and in needs studies.
- The data are being used in commuter rail studies in Virginia.
- The use of the data for efficiently designing samples for other surveys was also noted.

Participants in the workshop were unanimous in their support for the continued collection by the census of transportation-related data to play an integral role in planning for major transportation investments. There was considerable improvement in the quality of data between the 1970 census and the 1980 census. However, delay in the dissemination of data summaries caused severe program bottlenecks and inefficiencies.

Participants felt strongly that the census should not be the sole source of transportation planning data. Rather, other data sources should be structured to complement and enhance the basic data collected during the census.

Efforts to improve the accuracy and timeliness of geocoding should continue. Participants agreed that knowledgeable MPO staff members could greatly assist the bureau in geocoding. As such, there should be a concerted effort to resolve confidentiality issues to take advantage of this resource.

Minor modifications to certain journey-to-work questions would dramatically improve the usefulness of the data. It is possible to make the modifications without drastically revising the survey form or incurring significant cost increases.

In the 1990s, transportation planners and many other users will want to use 1990s information-processing technologies. We are no longer interested in paper reports.

The participants of the workshop also concluded that there was a major need to improve communications at all governmental levels. This should include the establishment of a training program to assist users of census data in general and the UTPP in particular.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following general recommendations were made:

1. The Bureau of the Census should be commended for improvements in the quality of 1980 census data, and we encourage efforts to continue to make improvements.
2. There is a continued need for the type and relative magnitude of transportation-related questions to be used in conjunction with other federal, state, and local data sources to plan for transportation investments.
3. The Bureau of the Census should provide data on a timely basis; the release should be phased as data become available, just as STF 1 tapes are released before the more detailed information.
4. Dissemination of 1990 data should be designed to take advantage of the communications technology most likely to be available in the 1990s.
5. Communications between affected parties at federal, state, and local levels should be improved.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made regarding research:

1. There should be a realistic evaluation of the issue of confidentiality as it relates to critical elements of census data.
2. There should be analyses of emerging communications technologies and information processing as they relate to the dissemination of census data to users.
3. There should be analyses of both theoretical and actual error related to sample size.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Questionnaire Content

Participants agreed that the highest-priority changes in the questionnaire were as follows: (a) the two questions about number of vehicles at home (H28, number of automobiles; H29, number of vans or trucks) should be combined and read "number of four-wheeled vehicles," whereas the categories should be expanded to three and more and four and more; and (b) mode of travel for the journey to work should be determined both for that usually used last week and for that used on a specific day last week (question 24b). In addition, respondents should be asked to circle each mode used in the journey to work (question 24b), and the travel-time question should be replaced by questions asking time of departure and time of arrival (question 24a).

Procedures and Sample Size

Research should be done on both theoretical and actual error related to sample

size. The research recommendations mentioned earlier are primarily focused on procedural matters. The workshop agreed that the highest-priority procedural change involves timely delivery of data.

Geographic Coding

Regardless of level of geographic coding, detailed coding should not delay delivery of journey-to-work data as major components are completed (e.g., county data should not be withheld until zone-level data are available). It was recommended that data coding at the block level be continued and that all Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) workplaces be coded at the block level, including MSA workplaces for those who reside outside MSAs.

Data Products

Users should be able to obtain data characteristics summarized by traffic analysis zone. More useful user documentation also should be provided. The workshop participants agreed that all census products should be available to users in user-friendly media (e.g., for use with microcomputers).

Compatibility

Other sources of transportation planning information including supplemental data such as the Nationwide Personal Transportation Study (NPTS) and small sample surveys should complement census data. Users should plan additional periodic travel data collection to complement the work of the Bureau of the Census, to obtain information on nonwork trips, and to add public credibility to analyses utilizing the data. There is a need for comparability and continuity among decennial censuses at well as comparability, to the extent feasible, among all Bureau of the Census data products.

Institutional and Administrative Concerns

The Bureau of the Census should consider retaining the services of MPO staffs to assist with geocoding. There should be a strong state transportation agency role in the purchase and use of census data to improve cost-effectiveness and timeliness of delivery. In assuming that role, state transportation agencies should set, or appropriately delegate, policies and specifications for UTPP data formats, media, hardware, and software. Training courses should be sponsored by FHWA, UMTA, and the Bureau of the Census for uses of the UTPP.