

A SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION PROCESS AS IT RELATES TO RELOCATION

Bamford Frankland, California Division of Highways, Sacramento

The primary goal of a state highway program is to provide a highway facility whose location, design, and transportation functions support the environmental views of the communities through which it traverses. A transportation system now must be concerned not only with user costs and requirements but also with the impact of the transportation system on the community and the environments through which it traverses. Social, political, and economic values of the environment through which a highway improvement is proposed must be given important consideration in the location and design of the highway improvement. The environmental features and facilities must be examined not only in their own light but also in their relationships to the larger community of which they are a part. The resistance that has been generated in many urban areas to transportation systems has come about simply because we have not had the capability of being sensitive or reacting to social and economic values of the community regarding the urban environment.

To be more sensitive to these community needs and desires, planners and engineers are seeking the advice of leaders in other disciplines and in the communities affected in the early stages of planning transportation corridors. The modern interdisciplinary approach toward route planning tries to take into consideration not only the interests of the articulate and politically powerful segments but also the needs and interests of those who lack political power. There is a conscious effort to avoid discriminating against any particular segment of the population.

Planning for new transportation systems may have lead times of 20 to 40 years before actual implementation. In California, for example, highway routes planned in 1946 are just being implemented today. Unfortunately, in many cases the highway departments continue to construct transportation facilities that were planned 15 or 20 years ago without a thorough reevaluation of the construction projects and the effects they will have on the existing community. Only within the last few years has there been the realization that transportation systems must go beyond user needs and become an integral part of achieving overall goals and needs and, at the same time, minimize the potential adverse effects on those along the right-of-way corridor.

The current approach to planning is to continuously review projects programmed for future construction so that they take into account changes occurring throughout the region during the period of time between the initial project planning and its actual construction. One of the most difficult problems in making such planning evaluation is the definition of the limits of a particular project study area. It is difficult to define the boundary for the impacts that a transportation system will have or to determine the kind of information that is needed to evaluate impacts and propose route alternatives.

Federal acts require that every community with a population of over 50,000 have a comprehensive land use and transportation plan for the next 20 years. Although these community plans have been done professionally, they may be neither exactly what the community wants nor a reflection of community goals, expectations, and desires. The transportation plans must be correlated with the desires and community values. Alternative routes must be studied in a great deal more detail on the basis of the opportunities these routes afford not only for users but also for the community to achieve social and economic goals. It has become clearly evident that the transportation corridor can be a detriment to the community through which it traverses; it must, if possible, be a positive asset to that community.

One of the principal problems is to identify the goals and values of a community and to evaluate them in terms of all the other factors to be considered. This is especially difficult to do if the values are not quantifiable. To further compound the problem, values among the community are not uniform and vary according to individual needs and perspective. Thus, identifying the community itself and the community's sensitivities is one of the primary steps involved in route planning.

A transportation facility is planned by first selecting for study a broad corridor that may be 2 to 10 miles wide. The corridor is studied for alternative route alignments and the consequences of each alignment as to both construction costs and effect on the communities traversed. This is a highly subjective process by which planners try to anticipate the consequences both to those displaced by the right-of-way and to the remaining community. Some of the considerations in evaluating alternative routes are right-of-way cost; assessed values of land; magnitude and kinds of displacements that may be incurred; replacement housing available; the neighborhood organizations and trends; the effects on government revenues and services, especially education; protection; utilities; parks and recreation; effects on germane property values and uses; excess land parcels; natural, historical, and agricultural resources; and commercial trade areas.

The community must participate in this planning process to provide information and to express attitudes. Also, federal legislation requires that route planning take into consideration the effects of the design of the facility itself on the surrounding environment. Thus, the current planning studies for corridor and route location provide the administrator with some rational bases for determining route selection considering not only right-of-way and construction costs but also impacts of the route on the adjoining property and communities.

To get full community participation at the hearings and other planning functions requires active solicitation of community support and participation through all interested agencies and organizations of the community. Very often there is a question about whether the public hearings actually reflect the desires and attitudes of the communities involved or are representative of only an articulate minority.

This approach I have described has guided the planning activities of the California Division of Highways in connection with the Century Freeway through the Watts community in Los Angeles (1, 2) and also in connection with facilities in San Leandro, outside of San Diego, Eureka, and Santa Cruz.

REFERENCES

1. Hill, Stuart L. Century Freeway (Watts). HRB Spec. Rept. 104, 1969, pp. 68-74.
2. Hill, Stuart L. Watts-Century Freeway. HRB Spec. Rept. 105, 1969, pp. 117-121.