

Neighborhood and Other Land Use Considerations

comments on the preceding 4 papers

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My comments on the preceding 4 papers touch on 4 general points.

The first is that traditional transportation planning has had a fairly simplistic view of the city as a work or marketplace. The ideal within the profession was to help people get around as fast as possible to fulfill those 2 basic functions. The attitude toward urban neighborhoods was that, at best, they were rather anachronistic. More usually, it was that they were a type of residential purgatory through which people had to go on their way to the paradise of the suburbs. Urban neighborhoods were not taken seriously. So it came as some surprise that many of the people living there took them seriously indeed and, even more surprising, that some of those people actually liked to live in the cities.

We are now coming to recognize that there are many people who are satisfied with living in cities and who want not only to retain those privileges but to improve them. As yet, we have a minimal understanding of what urban life really is, what satisfactions and needs are most important to people, and how, as policy makers and planners, we can satisfy them. So this is a dilemma we all face.

The second point deals with public participation. I wonder if our thinking about public participation and the methods we use to generate it are really getting at the fundamental issue: Is the public really participating in planning for the transportation it wants? I ask this because it seems that the public is usually asked to react to proposals that are defined within a professional context by professionals who have their own ideas of what transportation is and what is possible.

A second problem arises because most of our efforts in transportation are at the system level while people's concerns are at a local, simple level. This was brought home to me in connection with a project examining the transportation concerns of children and housewives. It is a revelation to actually talk to children and housewives and find (a) how important transportation is and (b) how much more important lack of transportation is. Many of them do suffer from a lack of transportation that prevents them from doing some of the simple things we take for granted. I do not think we have yet devised a public participation program that is getting at the needs and concerns of the people: what they want, how they want to move, and, more specifically, where and for what purpose.

The third point, which is closely related, concerns the degree to which we accept current travel patterns and trip habits as a basis for predicting future travel patterns. Much transportation planning, as it is defined, is in terms of what is done. The way people travel now is used as a basis for predicting the way they will probably travel in the future. Then facilities are provided and so forth. Of course, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy because people do not use facilities that are not there.

This gets back to the problem of determining where people would go if they could, how often, and for what purposes. We realize, or are coming to realize, for example, that the journey to work is not so salient an issue for most people in their choices of residential locations or perceptions of where they live in cities as transportation planners have long believed. I think as we look to the future we see that there is going to be a redistribution in the way people spend their time in cities. They are going to spend less time working and more time doing other things: going to school, amusing themselves, and so forth.

The fourth point is that transportation planning is essentially a political process. As a political scientist, I think this is what I liked best about the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan Review: It recognized this and went to considerable lengths to spell out for local politicians and decision makers the implied choices in terms of land use associated with the alternative transportation plans. And, although the review staff in general were extremely articulate, they were still too sophisticated for more than 90 percent of the metropolitan politicians.

As we approach some of the questions of dealing with issues that have arisen, i.e., managing the automobile and responding to neighborhood issues and demands, we have to remember that, no matter what we do, someone will benefit and someone else will get hurt. Appleyard indicated that in London lower class residents do not benefit because improvements made their neighborhood so attractive to middle class people. The fact that the middle class is moving back into the cities is sometimes viewed as a problem. Anything we do—control of automobile use, public participation programs that tend to involve the articulate and the best informed, upgrading streets and neighborhoods—in effect shifts the benefits of transportation planning from one privileged group to another or from one segment of both privileged groups to another. This still leaves a large but not very vocal group of people who have always been deficient in transportation and amenities of all kinds. Are we going to leave them in the same or possibly worsened position? This is another serious issue that we have to address.