

Patterning Cities and Change: Choices and Implications

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Speakers: Doris Holleb
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The growing ascendancy of multicentered or nodal cities—urban centers within the metro region—is an unmistakable trend, according to Doris Holleb. These growth centers present a very disparate socioeconomic settlement pattern and reflect the upper-income, white preference for country living. Centers are tied together with highways. They are atomized politically but united economically. Holleb said that we must plan with the grain of change, not attempt to return cities to their 19th-century mold. Institutions are needed to enable a sharing of fiscal resources and to accomplish integration. Some very specific issues were mentioned.

1. A national policy to revitalize our railroads is needed (this would greatly help the central business district).
2. The automobile serves much of the suburban commuting needs that exist. But this works against the viability of rail transit. Therefore, people must be urged to live closer to their places of work, shopping, and recreation. Then, they will use automobiles less often and make shorter trips.

Holleb suggested the following policy options:

1. Strengthen multiurban centers and minidowntown centers;
2. Increase housing opportunities for low- and middle-income families in the suburbs, nearer to their work; and
3. Improve mass transit facilities between satellite urban centers.

Larry Dallam explained that, in 1975, the Metropolitan Council of Twin Cities adopted a development framework, or growth policy, described by five identified areas:

1. Old downtown (a 24-hour city, not just an 8-to-5 place, containing new office space and new commercial activities);
2. A fully developed suburban ring just outside the central business district (maintain and upgrade investment here);
3. Urban service area (planned urbanization area where growth is now occurring and where services will be provided, with lots of room for expansion; all planned growth should be located here);
4. Small, free-standing growth centers (old rural centers, offering small town life-styles surrounded by farming areas that can accommodate many life-styles); and

5. Undeveloped rural areas (maintain agriculture by not providing services in these areas).

Development framework is based mostly on sewers, not transportation. Highways are designed to meet off-peak demand, not commuter demand. Commuters can be accommodated by car pooling. They are not going to accommodate a commuter demand of 1 occupant/vehicle.

The transit plan is to encourage people to live, work, and shop in a subregion. Formerly, transit planning was oriented to downtown or radial movements.

C. David Loeks suggested two approaches to the future patterning of cities:

1. Intelligent cooperation with the inevitable. Observe where things are going and what people want, and move that way. This is politically acceptable planning. Protect what we have, protect the integrity of highways, and do not keep adding land uses that will explode the system. We are running out of fiscal resources, environment, and public patience.
2. Meeting the future on purpose. Try to modify behavior so as to achieve goals. This involves choices that rely on changes in people's perceptions.

We have a choice in size of developments: residential, commercial, industrial, and spacing. What mix of urban configurations (big or small, dispersed or clustered) are transportation investments oriented to? The federal government must make policy decisions on the kinds of development needed and where money should be invested.

In discussing some of these ideas, Rodney E. Engelen made the point that we do not need more highways; rather we need to improve what we have through such concepts as automobile-restricted zones, pedestrian malls, and street beautification. Jack Meltzer stated that a new kind of central city may be emerging, one serving a new clientele. Hays B. Gamble pointed to a gap in the discussions at the conference regarding the translation of good transportation planning into actual land use development. Despite the best of comprehensive planning and public intentions, in most cases local elected officials are severely constrained in thwarting unsound siting decisions by developers. Institutional arrangements for land use control need to be developed that will provide local officials with the backing and the power they need in order to veto bad plans and to control development in a manner consistent with good transportation and community planning.