

# Introduction to the Conference Proceedings

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This conference represented the first major attempt to bring together professionals experienced and knowledgeable in transportation planning methodologies and techniques applicable to small and medium-sized places. The importance of this endeavor has been underlined by the creation by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the committee on transportation planning needs and requirements of small and medium-sized communities approximately four years ago. This committee was created in response to the expressed concern of many transportation planners and engineers for more attention by the various governmental agencies and the professional community to the many smaller cities having populations of fewer than 200 000. This new TRB committee is charged with balancing what many feel to be an inordinate emphasis on the problems and issues of the larger metropolitan areas.

The objectives of this conference were to provide for the exchange of experiences among a sample of practitioners engaged in transportation planning for cities of fewer than 200 000 people, to provide guidance for transportation policies and programs, to foster the development of future activities in this area and, lastly, to provide a document that will reflect the proceedings of the conference and serve as a basic resource for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers.

To achieve these objectives a program was designed that would identify and attract many types of individuals, experiences, technical expertise, and functional areas. An extensive survey was made of governmental agencies at all levels, private business, consulting firms, and the general professional community to identify people, techniques, and issues pertinent to the established objective. After many follow-up contacts and evaluations, a list of resources by functional areas was compiled. The functional areas were transit operations planning, traffic planning and operations, surveillance and socioeconomic forecasting, systems planning, and plan implementation. Implicit in the conference design was the importance of focusing on the issues pertinent to trans-

portation planning in smaller cities, the levels of effort to be allocated, and the techniques that have been found to be both effective and efficient.

The difficulty inherent in the design concept was the tendency of many conferences to deal primarily with policy issues while often failing to achieve other equally important objectives, such as the discussion of techniques. To balance the program, workshops in each functional area were structured into two sessions—one on issues and levels of effort and the other on techniques. Invited participants were assigned to one functional area for the conference duration. Plenary sessions provided an opportunity for general sharing of workshop experiences and group interaction.

The conference opened with a keynote address on the federal perspective of planning for transportation in small and medium-sized communities by Hassell that set the overall theme for the conference and provided the foundation for the plenary session papers. This was followed by the paper by Dees concerning the products of the transportation planning process from the state perspective and the one by Stover on the appropriate level of planning effort in smaller cities. These papers provided the catalysts for the workshops, which began by discussing issues and levels of effort pertinent to the functional workshop area. Resource papers were also used to aid the workshop deliberations. The second half of the conference was allocated to workshop activities on techniques. Resource papers were used to foster the discussions and interactions, and plenary sessions followed each workshop session so that all the participants could share in a summary of the activities that took place in other workshops.

These proceedings are an attempt to capture the spirit of the conference activities. The key addresses are provided, as are the resource papers presented in the workshops. The discussions and resultant interactions have been summarized and are included because they are as important as the formal papers.

## Conference Summary

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Because of the ever-increasing importance of balancing the resources for transportation investments against the total range of transportation needs, planners at all levels

of government are focusing greater attention on small- and medium-sized communities. The opportunities inherent in the characteristics of cities of 200 000 people

or fewer suggest a modification of the planning techniques and procedures for larger areas. Contrary to the needs of larger metropolitan areas, smaller places require less sophisticated techniques and methodologies for most transportation planning activities. One reason for difficulties experienced in past planning for transportation in smaller places has been in the uniform application of the traditional comprehensive, continuing, and cooperative (3C) approach. Often this approach lacks sensitivity to local concerns and issues and results, consequently, in an unimplementable planning document. The momentum of the traditional process, administratively and technically, is difficult to alter. However, as discussed in the paper by Fleet and others, a beginning has been made, at all levels of government, and in many locations around the country.

A city of 100 000 people is a very large place to a community of 2500. The process of identifying a transportation planning program and appropriate techniques by city size emphasizes the need to provide greater flexibility in local determination of needs and responses. Each community, regardless of its size, has its own problems and priorities, although these are often implicit and difficult to ascertain by outside professional transportation planners. Increasingly, transportation problems at this level are perceived by local officials as part and parcel of other community development problems. Thus, the balancing of long-range versus short-range planning is more a functional activity of the local area than an administrative requirement. The scale of transportation planning activities must reflect the local perspective.

In the 1970s, one of the major trends evident in the migration pattern in the United States has been the flow of people to smaller cities and rural areas. This reversal of earlier trends has been confirmed by population estimates, employment statistics, and sample surveys. The increased employment opportunities in services, trade, and construction, in addition to accessibility to nearby metropolitan areas, have been suggested as one reason for the reversal. Life-style objectives have been proposed as another reason for the out-migration from larger cities to smaller ones and rural areas. Of importance is the fact that the small and medium-sized cities are growing and growing at an average national rate almost twice that of the larger metropolitan areas. Regional trends reflect significant variations; in the sunbelt, the southern and western areas of the United States, there is both increased population growth in the smaller places and the development of new metropolitan areas. The implications and influences of these shifts are significant but not completely understood. The significance of these trends on transportation planning and potential investment supports the concern of many professionals who have advocated flexibility, simplicity, and local determination.

The recognized need for a less formalized transportation planning process for smaller urban areas is strongly supported in the paper by Hassell. The importance of this paper is in the mandate for (a) greater flexibility in organization and administrative arrange-

ments; (b) improved communication between the decision maker, the planner, and the general public; and (c) simplification in the administrative planning requirements as well as simplified planning procedures. The perceived changing role of transportation planning processes has led to a changing role for the Federal Highway Administration—the contribution to planning procedures responsive to local goals and concerns.

From a state perspective, Dees presents many of the concerns and frustrations that result from the failure of the traditional transportation planning process to meet the needs of smaller areas. The theme of local determination and a responsive program reflective of local goals and priorities is a requirement for an effective planning process. Stover, in assessing the appropriate level of effort, also dismisses the value of a uniformly applied transportation planning process and suggests guidelines for the planning effort as a function of the growth characteristics of the city and local problems.

Many similar findings and recommendations were noted in the various workshops, such as the needs for

1. Improved communication between the planner and the decision maker;
2. Local determination of goals, problems, and planning processes;
3. Sharing of technical assistance among various public and private entities;
4. Sharing of techniques;
5. Reduction in the administrative burden inherent in the transportation planning process; and
6. Flexibility in the use of available financial-aid programs.

The recognition of the need for greater local understanding, participation, and use of technical expertise is a major objective of the emerging transportation planning era for small and medium-sized cities. This can no longer be accomplished by the use of overly complex and unrealistic long-range plans that, because of financial and other institutional problems, can be implemented only with difficulty.

A variety of proven techniques is available that can improve many local planning efforts. Some of these are included in this report. They range from the more-traditional traffic-engineering procedures to the use of synthetic procedures based on data retrieved from secondary sources. The opportunity to integrate transit planning operations (where appropriate) into the transportation planning process for smaller areas may stimulate consideration of alternatives pertinent to addressing energy- or environment-related issues. Opportunities for other local participation, including those involved in the administration of local land-use controls, should also be pursued. The significance of this conference and its proceedings rests in the actions and reactions of the professional and local officials. The intent has been to acknowledge awareness, foster interaction, and stimulate implementation of a more-workable transportation planning process and decision structure.