

Political Factors and Administration and Financing of Urban Transportation

SUMMARY REPORT OF PANEL 5 ON POLITICAL FACTORS AND ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCING OF URBAN TRANSPORTATION

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In 1960, 63 percent of our population lived in 212 metropolitan areas. By 1980, 70 percent, according to Census Bureau projections, will be residents of such areas. As we are so predominantly a country of great and growing metropolitanism, the report of this panel concentrates upon the metropolitan area and utilizes it as a framework.

Metropolitan areas today usually are composed of three types of urban community: the old central city, the suburbs which serve chiefly as the bedroom for those who work in the central city, and the satellite communities within which people both live and work. This pattern of development is, of course, not static. The relationship between these different sections changes as do the social and economic character, the area and population size of the communities. An example is the changing character of the central city. An aspect is that while most of the industry there was once manufacturing, there is now a pronounced trend toward the service industries. Another aspect is that middle income families are leaving the central city for the suburbs. It is said that central cities are tending to become places where the very poor and the very wealthy live.

The transportation system is an integral part of the metropolitan complex. It determines to a large extent the physical shape, functioning and appearance of the area. It provides the means for the movement and interchange of people, services, and goods which sustain and condition the life of the area. The question of what kinds of transportation we want cannot be answered effectively or appropriately unless we know what kind of a city of metropolitan community we want. The transportation system is not just a passive facility which serves existing and accumulating needs. It is a powerful force which, in influencing the form of our communities, affects in major ways their development and the quantities and qualities of future needs. Therefore, transportation serving the central city, for example, must be planned not only to provide for a service-oriented change, but also take into account a flight to the suburbs on one hand and urban renewal programs reversing such trend on the other.

The solution of any metropolitan area problem is complicated by the typical political organization which is a complex and confused pattern of city, county, town, township and special district governments, having varied kinds and degrees of jurisdiction and autonomy. State governments also are increasingly affected by and concerned with expanding urbanization of recent years, which has markedly changed distribution and population, wealth and fiscal capacity. Another level of government — the Federal — is accentuating and accelerating its involvement in urban community, metropolitan area and transportation matters. Finally, there are problems of achieving coordination and cooperation, not only between the different levels of government, but also between different agencies at each level. It occasions no surprise that it has proved difficult to achieve public recognition of the need and the logic of treating as an entity, and comprehensively, our areawide metropolitan problems.

The urban transportation problem, perhaps more than any other, emphasizes and underlines the difficulties arising from these complex urban patterns that characterize metropolitan areas. By the same token, the critical need for adequate circulation in an

urban area makes it imperative that these complexities be overcome and that an effective system of transportation facilities be established and maintained.

Whatever means of achieving such a system are developed will necessarily involve three classes of participants no matter what level of government is concerned. They are the elected officials who determine the policy to be applied; the technicians who, within that policy, provide the physical facilities; and the members of the general public who are served by, and who pay for, the facilities. The general public within a metropolitan area is not a homogeneous mass, of course, but consists of many substantial private groups with divergent interests. Any suggestion for improving the urban transportation situation should be developed with an eye to the interests of all participating groups and they all must be involved in any processes which are going to be effective.

Many techniques have been developed and used to cope with the problems arising from the existence of multiple local jurisdictions within metropolitan areas. The scope of this panel's inquiry included approaches to urban transportation problems which would require only limited, if any, changes in the existing framework of political boundaries and administrative authority. More specifically, the suggested research encompasses means of obtaining cooperation and coordination among existing local governing bodies, operating departments, and personnel; and to changes in the organizational status which are in the nature of delegations of authority over single functions or for special purposes. It is also recognized that important contributions can be made by quasi-governmental and less formal institutions such as associations of officials and other persons concerned with transportation.

Even if it is assumed that all authorities concerned could agree on what urban form and what transportation facilities they want — and unwarranted assumption — there remains the problem of finance. How can local governments raise the money to pay for the transportation they wish and need? With an ever greater share of available tax dollars going to other governments — especially the Federal — there are knotty questions to be settled regarding the extent to which the various levels of government can be or should be financially involved in metropolitan transportation, and respecting kinds and degrees of participation. Current examples of Federal participation are that of the Federal agency which is charged with planning a comprehensive and integrated transportation system for the Washington, D. C., Metropolitan area, the recently announced policy of coordination and joint financing by the HHFA and Public Roads in comprehensive planning in cities, and the transportation planning research demonstration grants and loans provisions of the Housing Act of 1961.

Panel 5 concerned itself with research affecting the ways and the extent to which existing levels of government do or should participate in the administration and financing of metropolitan transportation, identifying the relevant working procedures and techniques which will achieve optimum conditions from such governmental interaction, including those, importantly, which pertain to comprehensive planning of cities and metropolitan areas.

The members of Panel 5 feel that the most necessary research in this subject area is embodied in the following proposals.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 1

Intergovernmental Mechanisms

Problem — The solution of transportation problems is complicated by the fact that the geographical area over which a problem extends is very seldom under a single local governmental jurisdiction. In fact, most metropolitan areas consist of a complex pattern of city, county, town, township, and special district governments, all with different types of political jurisdiction. Since people and goods circulate over the entire metropolitan area, the transportation problems of each unit do not stop at its political boundary and cannot be solved by that unit acting alone. Some sort of interaction between local units is necessary, then, but is made difficult by differences in needs and attitudes of the different units which arise from differences in population, geographical

size, type and degree of land development, wealth, political organization, historical development, and innumerable other factors.

Research Proposed— Many governmental arrangements have been developed to facilitate the handling of areawide problems on an areawide basis. These include federation, intergovernmental contracts and administrative arrangements, functional authorities, annexation, extraterritorial planning powers, and functional authorities or special districts. This research would first inventory all such devices and the extent to which they have been used to ameliorate urban transportation difficulties. The next step would be to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of each for transportation purposes. The last step would be to analyze and study the information developed, to formulate suggestions for improving the transportation effectiveness of each device, and also for the formulation of new devices which would be particularly useful from a transportation point of view.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 2

Decision Making Arrangements

Problem— There are three groups involved in the provision of urban transportation facilities. They are the elected officials who make the basic policy decisions, the technicians who assist in the formulation of policy and construct the facilities in accordance with it, and the general public which pays for and uses these facilities. Actually, more than three groups are involved, because within the metropolitan area there are usually many groups of elected officials at various levels of government involved and often many groups of technicians, such as different planning groups, which take part. Also the public interest is a conglomerate of innumerable private interests. The legal or assigned jurisdiction of the various groups of elected officials and technicians is often quite confused as to who has authority over various questions. Further, even where the legal jurisdiction is quite clearly set out, there is some question as to whether, as a matter of practice, each group performs its proper role or whether there are omissions and wasteful overlapping. For instance, complaints are sometimes heard that local officials are left out of highway decisions which affect their communities and in which they should have a voice.

Research Proposed— By studying actual case histories of the development and construction of different transportation facilities learn as much as possible about the decision making which was involved. The emphasis should be on identifying that decision-making machinery which is most effective rather than on criticizing projects which have not been successful. Some of the specific questions which should be answered are as follows:

1. What interests are considered by those who formulate policy and what weight is given to the different interests involved?
2. Does the taxpayer, through the ballot, public hearing process, or otherwise, have an effective voice in the decisional process?
3. Do the elected officials and technicians stay within their assigned areas or do the elected policy makers dictate details which should be left up to the technicians, and do the technicians carry out the policy set by elected officials, or do they by indirection frustrate and change the policy?

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 3

Methods of Communication

Problem— Transportation is directly or indirectly connected with almost all phases of life in an urban community. Consequently, transportation problems are affected not only by transportation agencies, but also by the agencies concerned with other aspects of urban life. Lack of communication and exchange of information on objectives and plans among the different agencies often results in inefficiencies, duplication of work, and sometimes in agencies actually working at cross-purposes with each other. For instance, the installation of a sewer line may lead to land development and, therefore,

increase the demand for transportation facilities. This works in reverse, of course, and the construction of a highway will also lead to development of land and the inevitable demand for services. If the agencies discuss their plans before any construction is done, they can be modified to best meet the objectives of the community as a whole rather than the more limited objectives of each agency. Many problems in this area are caused not by any lack of authority to cooperate, but by the simple fact that one agency does not know or try to find out what other agencies are doing.

There is also the problem of communication between governmental agencies and the citizens whom they serve. A great deal of public opposition or lack of support for projects or programs of governmental agencies is founded upon a lack of information. The programs and plans of public agencies must be satisfactory from a technical viewpoint, of course, but they also should be presented to the public in understandable, graphic and palatable form. If an agency explains to the public what it is doing and the benefits which will result from its activity, a good deal of opposition can be overcome and replaced by active and interested public support.

Research Proposed — This problem can be studied by examining case histories of projects and working procedures of different agencies. It should seek to determine what sort of policies, procedures and practices result in the most satisfactory exchange of information and working relationships between agencies within the government and with the general public.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 4

Comparison of Responsibilities and Resources

Problem — The responsibility of providing highway transportation facilities is shared by Federal, State, and local governmental units. Each is responsible for different classifications of highways. State and local governments often complain that the Federal Government takes so much of the tax dollar that they are not left with sufficient funds to adequately meet their local responsibilities.

Research Proposed — Compare the responsibilities for transportation facilities that various governmental units have with the resources that are available to them for the purpose of meeting these responsibilities. More simply put — Is the share of the total roadbuilding program which is assigned to each governmental unit proportional to its share of total revenues available for roadbuilding purposes? This research would not attempt to answer policy questions of how much is to be spent for various highway purposes. It would provide much needed documentation. It would tell the policy maker how much he can realistically expect each level of government to produce from the resources available to it. If it were found that the resources and responsibilities were not in balance, the study would indicate how much of an adjustment had to be made and present alternatives for making it. The ultimate questions of the adjustments to be made in the revenue structure or the distribution of functions would be for the policy maker.

A specific project which was suggested in this area was a study to determine the cost to improve all urban highways to various alternate standards. This would give legislators a definite indication of the results to be expected from the allocation of funds to urban highway transportation.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 5

Private Planning

Problem — Planning done by governmental agencies is not the only type which has an impact on transportation. Private planning such as that involved in the location of public utilities, location of plants, and the policies of insurance companies, lending institutions, and other private organizations substantially affect the pattern of land development and thus the demand and need for transportation facilities. The planning done by private institutions, if done independently of and without regard for the decisions and programs of public planning agencies, can very well lead to inconsistencies which will frustrate to some extent the purposes of both plans.

Research Proposed— Find out how private planning is accomplished, how it affects urban transportation, and the extent to which the relationship is recognized by both public and private planners. What sort of programs do private planners have? Are their processes similar to public planning? What factors and interests do they consider? Do they consider the impact that they will have on transportation systems and how it will ultimately affect their own interests? The research would develop suggestions for improving public and private transportation planning by means of exchange of information or other types of coordination and cooperation.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 6

Public Works Program

Problem— The facilities constructed by the government have a direct and substantial role in determining the shape and character of a community. Within a metropolitan area there are public works— such as airports, highways, bridges, government buildings, parks, recreational facilities, sewage disposal and water supply facilities, libraries, and schools— being built by various agencies of all levels of government. The different public agencies involved carry on their planning functions in many different ways. The program of each is often formulated and carried out without any recognition or knowledge of the program of others, except where there is a direct physical conflict such as when two agencies want the same land for different purposes. It would seem that coordinated programming of all such governmental activities with due regard to the total effect on the community would be one way to promote orderly and stable development in metropolitan areas.

Research Proposed— Examine the utility and feasibility of a coordinated and unified public works program for all levels of government within a metropolitan area. Investigate the possibility of making such a plan a condition precedent to Federal aid, or in some other way inducing all agencies operating within metropolitan areas to make definite plans for their activities and to take into consideration the activities of all other governmental agencies.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 7

Metropolitan Planning Agencies

Problem— Since World War II, approximately 70 metropolitan planning agencies have been organized in the United States to deal with metropolitan problems on an area-wide basis. A study of the organization and operation of these institutions would enable them and the communities they serve to benefit from their collective experience and would point up the more effective means they have developed for dealing with transportation problems.

Research Proposed— Study the organization, functions, legal scope, program emphasis, and intergovernmental relations of the U. S. metropolitan planning agencies. Determine whether their advisory powers allow them to deal adequately with metropolitan transportation problems. Should they be considered of primary importance in attacking metropolitan transportation problems? How can they be adapted and developed to more effectively deal with such problems?

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 8

Land Use Controls

Problem— Zoning, subdivision regulations, and all land use controls influence the pattern of urban development and thus affect the transportation system in one way or another. If land use control decisions are made without understanding or considering their effect on transportation, the results may be harmful to the community. For instance, a zoning decision to allow industrial development may lead to such an increase in traffic that the advantages of having industry are offset by the disadvantages of congestion. Had this been anticipated, the decision could have been modified to minimize or avoid the detrimental effect. For another example, rather minor modifications in

subdivision plats, where the subdivision is to be near a busy highway, can prevent the new development from interfering with the efficient operation of the highway. If the subdivision is approved without thinking about its relationship to the highway, the result is apt to be a reduction in the highway's capacity to accommodate traffic. It is especially critical that the relationship between land use control and highways be taken into consideration in the vicinity of new interchanges where increased accessibility quickly multiplies the demand for nearby land.

Research Proposed— The premise behind this proposal is that proper controls, properly administered, can protect the public investment in highways by preventing impairment of highway capacity due to interference from land development. The purpose of the study is to determine which controls and which means of administration are best suited to this end. The effectiveness of various control techniques should be evaluated with respect to various transportation problems. For instance, can we adequately protect a certain type of interchange from deterioration by application of subdivision controls? Or are other established controls better? Or must some sort of new control be developed? In addition to such substantive aspects, the research would go into organizational and procedural matters, such as the question of whether controls administered exclusively by local governments can effectively deal with highway problems.

Probably the most significant contribution to be made by the research would be to formulate, once the need for controls has been established, the specific standards to be applied under those controls to achieve the necessary balance between land use and transportation.