

the media wasn't precisely right in portraying what we were doing, that supportive citizens were not as active as the opponents, that other issues intervened, that certain parts of the concept were not heard, and that we didn't have the opportunity for more communications (particularly with the grass roots groups). But life isn't always fair - we have that now on authority - we got the road pricing concept across pretty well, as Frank was saying, so aren't we really interested in citizen participation only because we didn't get the outcome that we wanted?

I think that's precisely right. I'm convinced that we would not be so interested in citizen participation and we wouldn't be having this presentation here this morning if the outcome had been to bring something like the road pricing demonstration we hoped for. In fact, the road pricing study team knows this because we now spend more time looking at more palatable variations of the road pricing idea than we spend thinking about citizen participation information channels and the like. However, I also want to say I don't think this means we haven't learned anything about citizen participation. I would bet many of you in the audience have been in a situation of pressing for politically unpopular concepts and have drawn some good lessons about citizen participation as a result. I would argue any analyst worth his or her salt will find an idea he or she believes might save some part of the world and will want to know about ways to ensure that it gets its best chance at generating support and its best chance of being tried. So, from the admitted position of someone trying to see a particular transportation concept tried, I've drawn five seemingly simple ideas for discussion -- ideas I wish we had tuned into earlier in our work with the cities. I hope they might help anyone interested in citizen participation, because you want to see certain controversial and promising ideas implemented whether they are your ideas, the ideas of citizen groups, economists, or otherwise. Hopefully, the lessons apply whether you are working from the top down through governmental agencies, as we tended to do, or from the bottom up at the community level. A case where the lesson may not apply is where your particular idea is not controversial.

Lessons Learned

First Lesson: Discuss the concept with decision makers, citizens' group representatives, and interest group leaders on a one to one basis and get their reaction before holding larger meetings to explain the concept. I think we learned that large meetings risk a certain amount of misunderstanding and don't necessarily elicit the most frank responses from public figures. This step would give you the first outline of a kind of "map" that tells you where different actors and interests stand and whether or not it is worth going ahead.

Second Lesson: This one was taught us directly by a very savvy decision maker in Madison. Ask people you know in the community to name media representatives who are good at the job of communicating potentially

controversial ideas. Then seek out the best people before any large meetings and discuss the concept with them and answer questions. The media obviously can't and won't be co-opted, but trying to get the story as straight as possible is worth some effort.

Third Lesson: Be sure you have got a good "lightning rod person". In our case where we were working with cities to study and implement the concept, we needed someone to answer the citizens' questions, set up informational meetings, perhaps answer a hot line, and prepare our newsletters. Washington analysts can't do this unless an office is set up on site. Local consultants trying to play this lightning rod role find that they can get burned doing it. The citizens see the consultant coming to represent the cities' viewpoints and simply cuts him or her off as soon as the heat is on. I don't know if that reaction of the city is more or less ethical than the consultant himself trying to play the lightning rod role. Whatever the case, there is a risk that the consultant will appear to speak with the city. Perhaps in our case planning funds should have been available for this lightning rod-type person to be within the city structure.

Fourth Lesson: Be sure that the concept itself is capable of variation. Whether your concept is likely to generate heat, resistance, or conflict, you need to be open to making changes within it, both for your sake and for the sake of the area you are in (though I once couldn't imagine how our sacred road pricing concept could be altered). We have now spent a considerable amount of time trying to think about variations on the theme, thanks to the citizens of Berkeley and Madison.

Fifth Lesson: Watch more than just the citizen participation and the transportation literature when you are thinking about citizen participation. I would suggest particularly that you look at policy analysis journals like Public Interest and Policy Analysis. These journals are giving more attention to frustrated studies and demonstration attempts. These cases come from health, education, housing and other issue areas. There are very good lessons in this literature about implementation and about the role of citizen participation in implementation. There is some particularly good material on why Washington-based ideas flounder at the local level. I'm thinking of a recent article in the Public Interest on educational vouchers, where one could have taken the word "road pricing" and inserted it for "educational vouchers" and come up with our particular story.

A POLITICAL SCIENTIST'S COMMENTARY ON THE BERKELEY/MADISON EXPERIENCE, Arnold M. Howitt

We confront a troublesome dilemma. For years some transportation economists and planners have advocated the use of pricing schemes to allocate road space more rationally in congested urban areas. Yet, despite the enthusiasm reflected in professional journals and conference sessions, they have been deeply disappointed that these schemes have not been implemented.

Some proponents of road pricing comfort themselves by thinking that the public lacks sufficient information about the potential benefits of these policies. By that reasoning, we might conclude that public opposition could be overcome by better dissemination of information or more effective salesmanship. That conclusion, I believe, is simplistic. Road pricing experiments have so far proved politically infeasible. It is not by chance that when Urban Mass Transportation Administration went searching for demonstration sites it wound up in Berkeley and Madison, university communities noted for unconventional politics. Even there, as we have heard, pricing policies were too hot politically to survive a preliminary study. If we hope to promote experimental implementation of road pricing policies, we must be far more penetrating in our analysis of the political obstacles involved.

Patterns of Political Support and Opposition

To some, the public reaction to UMTA's proposed road-pricing demonstration was a startling occurrence. Virtually no citizens' groups or individuals spoke out in favor of the experiments, while many expressed intense opposition. In fact, however, that outcome was predictable. As political scientists James Q. Wilson and Alan Altshuler suggest, we can account for varying patterns of political activity by analyzing how citizens perceive the potential impacts of a policy measure. We know, first, that citizens act defensively. They are more likely to organize or speak up in response to sudden or large decreases in net benefits than to the promise of increased benefits; they are more oriented toward threats than opportunities. We also know that the distribution of costs and benefits shapes patterns of political support and opposition. Several dimensions of that distribution are important:

1. Costs or benefits may be concentrated on individuals or relatively small groups of people, or they may be widely diffused throughout society. Concentrated impacts make political action more probable, because there are stronger incentives for individuals. When only a few are affected, the efforts of a single individual are more likely to influence the outcome than when many are involved; and, in a small group, those efforts are more likely to be recognized and rewarded by one's peers. Furthermore, political activity is more likely to result when policy impacts are felt by individuals who share a common identity and who have established relationships than when policy effects are widely dispersed among a heterogeneous population.
2. Individuals assess the magnitude of policy or benefits. Unsurprisingly, large impacts are more likely to motivate political action than small ones.
3. Citizens tend to be more sensitive to immediate costs or benefits than to the long-range effects.
4. Individuals are more likely to take political action when they can directly identify impacts as the consequence of

specific government actions than when policy impacts are felt indirectly.

As a result, we should expect to find more vigorous political activity when citizens are warding off threats to their current life circumstances rather than seeking to improve them, and when either costs or benefits are concentrated, large, immediate, and seen as directly linked to specific policies. The probability of political action declines when these conditions are reversed.

This theoretical framework can help us account for the great reluctance of public officials to promote road pricing schemes and help us explain the patterns of political support and opposition that emerge when a demonstration is proposed. Let us consider how citizens are likely to perceive the potential benefits and costs of a road pricing experiment.

What benefits do advocates of pricing policies promise? Most commonly mentioned are more efficient utilization of road space, shorter travel times as congestion is reduced, air quality improvements, energy conservation, better access for pedestrians, and increased tax revenues. Brief reflection suggests why there has been so little political support for the proposed UMTA demonstrations. The impact of each of these benefits is widely dispersed among large numbers of people, and the net increase in benefits for any particular individual is fairly small. Furthermore, the impacts of many of these benefits extend over relatively long periods of time, and the typical citizen may fail to notice some of them or fail to perceive them as a consequence of the pricing policies. As a result, it is very difficult to stir up a positive political response to pricing proposals. We do not find political organizations of commuters or pedestrians; no group presses strongly for energy conservation; and, until recently, few spoke out for clean air. Nor are individuals who favor the policy likely to support it actively, even to the extent of writing or phoning public officials. The stakes are so low that few people will make the effort; and since "the government" sponsors the project, it does not seem to need persuasion. Therefore, public officials who promote pricing experiments -- whether or not at UMTA's urging -- should expect little active political support, either from organized interests or from individuals.

The costs imposed by road pricing schemes are far more likely to stimulate active political opposition. Among these costs are some that are also widely dispersed among the population, for example the disruption or normal travel to work or shopping and the monetary costs imposed to ration use of congested roads, bridges, and tunnels. Individuals must find new ways to get to work, change their schedules, or pay for an opportunity to travel that was previously free. For any particular citizen, these costs are moderately large, immediate, and easily perceived as a direct effect of the road pricing scheme. While the diffusion of costs makes organized opposition by commuters unlikely, the other characteristics of these costs tend to stimulate individual protests.

That accounts for the angry phone calls to politicians and the letters to the editor prompted by the announcement of the Urban Institute's studies of pricing policies. If a pricing scheme were actually implemented, one could expect a crescendo of protest.

Not all costs of a pricing experiment are widely diffused and only moderately large. Certain individuals and groups are likely to perceive substantial concentrated costs. If the pricing scheme required a daily license for travel to the central business district, a number of interests would be affected. Retail merchants might fear that their customers would be diverted to suburban shopping malls. Employers might be concerned that their workers would have difficulty reaching work on time. Operators of delivery vehicles might worry about disruption of their schedules. Parking lot operators might fear a decline in patronage if commuters or shoppers switched to transit. If residential neighborhoods exist just outside the proposed licensed area, residents might fear a sudden influx of extra traffic searching for fringe parking. In some cases, the negative consequences anticipated by these interests may seem far-fetched to proponents of the pricing scheme. But the potentially affected individuals or firms are likely to respond to the threat of damaging impacts, despite uncertainty; defensive behavior is the norm when the stakes are high. These interests can mobilize relatively easily to oppose public policy. In some instances, they already have organizations to promote their interests, for example retail trade boards, chambers of commerce, associations of garage operators, and neighborhood improvement groups. When such organizations do not exist, they may be created in response to the perceived common threat.

The Risks for Public Officials

If this analysis is correct, then public officials who consider road-pricing schemes confront a difficult and risky situation. On one hand, the public is unlikely to press spontaneously for such policies, and an official would have difficulty stimulating even a modest demonstration of public support. On the other hand, intense opposition is quite likely to emerge. Because astute politicians recognize this situation intuitively, most shy away from UMTA's road pricing demonstrations. Those who do not immediately perceive the risks, or who hope to buck the odds, are likely to be frightened off when vigorous opposition develops; that appears to have happened in Berkeley and Madison.

It is important to recognize that this situation is not simply the result of inadequate efforts to convince citizens of the benefits of road pricing policies. Instead it is a consequence of the particular distribution of the costs and benefits of these policies; the patterns of political support and opposition are a structural feature of the policy arena. Other policy issues that are characterized by similar distributions of benefits encounter similar political obstacles.

Environmental policy illustrates the problem that makes the road pricing situation

particularly difficult. Despite the diffusion of benefits, it has sometimes been possible to build a constituency for environmental controls even when there is strong opposition from those who absorb concentrated costs (for example, industrial polluters). But it has often proved politically impossible to implement environmental policies when significant costs are more widely diffused, as has been the case with the transportation control plans promulgated by EPA since 1973.

The prospects of successful implementation of road pricing experiments might be somewhat improved by three strategies. First, advocates could scale down their aspirations. Less ambitious schemes -- smaller licensing areas, for example -- would threaten fewer interests and minimize active opposition. Second, proponents of pricing policies could aggressively promote multi-issue arguments in favor of their position. They should not depend on the rationale that they find persuasive -- for example, congestion reduction -- to convince all others. Skillful public relations might indeed redefine some perceptions of the balance of costs and benefits. Finally, UMTA should continue to lend support to pricing experiments. Its financial support reduces some of the risks accepted by cooperative public officials. And, under certain circumstances, it can compensate some who feel disadvantaged, for example, by showing merchants that improved transit service will substitute for reduced auto access.

Nonetheless, I am pessimistic. The picture of the problems of citizen involvement is essentially a bleak one. Furthermore, the focus of this panel and lack of time prevent me from sketching out a set of bureaucratic problems that complement the constituency dilemma. At least in the short run, the prospects for implementing significant road-pricing experiments seem poor.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Sid Davis, Atlanta University

One of the most significant results of the attempt to experiment with transportation pricing schemes has been the ability of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) staff to learn from their failure to get communities to agree to actually carry out experiments -- perhaps expensive lessons but, nonetheless, very educational.

By their own admission, they now realize the range of pricing options presented to the communities was unnecessarily constrained by notions of what might be desirable as pricing experiments, rather than helping communities understand that a pricing scheme might be an appropriate tool in dealing with a transportation related community problem. Bert Arrillaga has clearly indicated that he intends to expand the "menu" of pricing experiment options so that the communities might be more amenable to serving as sites for these kinds of project demonstration efforts.