

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.

It also seems that most of the persons involved in attempting to promote these particular schemes understand that they should not a priori assume that the reactions of the community and the ultimate rejection of their proposals were not appropriate responses, and that better "marketing" would have made the proposal acceptable. While we must be cautious in how we judge public response and not become obsequious to notions of the infallibility of these demonstrations of feelings, at the same time we had better be sensitive and politically perceptive about the information that is being communicated by such community responses.

We should realize, for example, that the objective of the use of pricing schemes to constrain vehicle use is counter intuitive to the past body of experiences of most people. They probably wondered how it would be possible to maintain (and even increase) activities in the community and, at the same time, reduce the number of vehicles. This is certainly the concern of business people, who associate traffic with store volumes, and ultimately, their own profits. The proposals also could be perceived to be discriminatory use of a public good directly used to improve the mobility of the more affluent who could afford to pay the "price", although I am not sure that such distributional equity problems were associated with these particular proposals.

It is interesting that we provide substantial resources to develop plans and devise abstract models of consumer behavior but neglect to, a priori, consider with any elegance the behavioral response of communities, especially in relationship to such sensitive and potentially controversial issues as transportation planning. We seem to be willing to learn "after the fact" about citizen response and that is very expensive on-the-job training.

Earl Robb, Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation

The experience of Berkeley and Madison has been an interesting situation. It reminds me of my first experience many years ago with public participation. We held a project public hearing in a small rural farming community concerning a secondary road improvement. The public hearing took place in a local high school auditorium with about 50 farmers and their families in attendance. Arrangements for the hearing included the display of detailed engineering drawings, the dissemination of technically oriented study reports, and placement of a microphone for recording purposes. The contingent of highway engineers paraded before the audience presenting superb dissertations on the merits of the proposed improvement. The presentations were followed by an invitation to the citizens to move forward, speak into the microphone, and comment on the proposal. An elderly farmer rose, walked to the front of the audience, passed the microphone, positioned himself in front of one of the sound speakers used with the public address amplification system, and proceeded to give his comments.

In one respect this could be perceived as a very humorous situation. In reality it drove home the point that we often assume too much in preparing for public participation. If the old farmer had difficulty distinguishing between the microphone and the speaker system, how much did he really understand of our superb engineering presentations?

Sound communication techniques are the basis of any public participation program. We must attempt to identify the values and expectations of the citizens. We must ensure that our plans and terminology are understood. We must, as a prerequisite for public participation, attempt to identify community goals and objectives and to relate those goals and objectives to our proposals.

There is a great danger in assuming that the local political structure speaks for the citizen in every situation. Many in the public sector view public administrators and elected officials with a degree of distrust. While the public demands service from government officials, it does not relinquish its right to be properly informed and to be included in the decision making process.

Public participation must be initiated during the earliest stages of the program planning. The existing organizational structures should be employed as a mechanism for accomplishing meaningful citizen involvement and great care should be taken to avoid a segmented concept in the introduction of a new project. Any proposal as complex as transportation pricing should be incorporated with regional or areawide planning. It is difficult to justify radical new concepts without first relating the benefits of such concepts to a total transportation package.

The study presented has a great deal of merit; however, it should now be obvious that implementation of such projects will be extremely difficult in the absence of public support.

Robert Hixson, Federal Aviation Administration

I feel that the key to your problems may be that of confusing planning with implementation. Citizen participation is not a public relations tool. It is not intended as a tool to sell a preconceived plan. It is instead an integral part of the planning process.

You have a product to sell, road pricing. It is a possible solution to the problems of congestion and air pollution. But it is only one from among perhaps many possible solutions. Your approach, with citizen participation, should have been problem oriented. You should have enlisted the participation of the citizens to solve the problems at hand, including your product -- road pricing -- as one of the alternatives for their consideration. Your solution was being imposed upon rather than being assumed by the citizens. The solution was preconceived rather than growing out of the citizen participation activities.

A good example of this was the Gruen Plan for downtown Fort Worth, Texas. It was a good plan, which significantly advanced the concepts of what a city center could be and which is still having positive effects upon