

CHARLOTTE

Minette Trosch, Mayor Pro-Tem

This is an exciting opportunity for me to share with you what is happening in Charlotte related to urban mobility. Our city is in the embryonic phase. We are a city that has not yet faced a congestion crisis but we definitely know it is coming.

Charlotte is a progressive city with a long history of public-private cooperation. It is upon this cooperative base that we build our strategies for the future. We, as a community, are determined to maintain a high quality of life as we grow. A cornerstone of our plans for Charlotte is the major commitment that has been made for over a decade by elected officials to build an economically vital urban core. We have made an effort to become a city that maintains a healthy heart, and not just a city of sprawling suburbs. Located in the center of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area of approximately one million people, the city itself has a population of 325,000. A financial and banking center, Charlotte enjoys the largest banking resources between Philadelphia and Dallas. We are also a major transportation hub with our excellent trucking, rail, and air services.

Through past studies, we have gained a clearer understanding of the dynamics that are going to play a significant role in our city over the next decade. We have learned that Charlotte's employment base in the central business district will double in size to 100,000 people by the year 2000. This will coincide with expanded commercial development. It has become clearly apparent that there is no way that we can accommodate that kind of growth without massive congestion problems. Given our limited gateway capacity into the center city, the community began to realize that we had to balance our transportation system.

The approach taken several years ago was to increase transit's share of the transportation modal split to 40 percent. The community was very supportive conceptually of the need to increase the transit and its usage. In support of an increased transit role for uptown, the citizens of Charlotte passed a major bond referendum which included several transit components, a bus maintenance facility, new buses, and most significantly, a transit mall for uptown. The public sector was only able to do this by the very active role of our business community who went with us to the voters and explained the need.

However, we found that we were not building ridership in our system; instead, it was beginning to stabilize and taper off. At the same time, study projections were coming true. Our center city development was mushrooming. The business community was supporting our uptown. They were investing dollars to locate offices and to build structures. Therefore, we did a reassessment. Realizing that a 40 percent transit share modal split was unrealistic, the public sector felt that a 25 percent transit share was achievable. In addition, we would have to work on increasing the shared ride concept for uptown. However, this approach made it more incumbent on us to look to the private side. We began to realize that we were narrowly defining the role the private sector had to play and should play in finding solutions for our city.

Before I share with you the success that we have had in getting the private sector's involvement, let me share with you an experience on how not to get the private sector involved. On one occasion, the mayor had a breakfast with the leaders of the business community in the uptown and asked for their support to solve a transportation problem.

He offered the services of the city's Department of Transportation and their programs. A couple of companies did work with our department, but the majority of those present went home not understanding what the next step was. Therefore, in reality nothing changed. The city had failed to develop the proper method to approach the private sector. We failed because we did not tell the story well and because we neglected to structure a program that the business leadership of our city could take the initiative in and pursue the next step. City government was still trying to be the leader in solving the problem.

During the two years that followed, the city tried to develop a new program to solve the problem. The private sector seemed to instinctively know that we needed help and offered their assistance through the Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation. What began as a narrowly defined topic on transit finance grew into a major commitment led by our top business people to solve the bigger issue of transportation management in our uptown. The private sector began to understand that it was in their enlightened self-interest to work with the public sector to avoid the predicted congestion crisis. We, as a community, now understand that our ability to increase the supply side of transportation options for our center city is simply very limited. The major part of the equation to solve this problem rests with those who create our peak hour demand, the large employers of our uptown. It is only with their support and their leadership that we can develop and implement solutions. We are, indeed, fortunate as a city to have chief executive officers like Cliff Cameron, Chairman of the Board of the First Union Corporation and the Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation, who has committed personally many hours and his vast talents to spearhead this effort.

Remarks of Cliff Cameron, Chairman, Uptown Development Corporation

Before getting into specifics on some of the things we are doing in transportation, let me tell you a little about the Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation. The idea for CUDC arose from the Chamber of Commerce in the 1970s because they felt that uptown needed economic stimulation. The city asked our state legislature to permit them to appoint an uptown authority and at the same time, authorize the establishment of the municipal service district to provide the public financing for this authority. The Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation has been operating now for about five years. It annually contracts a 1.75 cents ad valorem tax on uptown properties. Our board is a most prestigious group of 16 individuals who are very influential and action-oriented.

The objective of the Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation is to provide continuing development of uptown and work in close harmony with both the public and private sectors, of which both are well represented on our board. At times, we play a leadership role; at other times, we play a cooperative role; and sometimes, we actually play only a monitoring role. No matter which role, we are involved in anything and everything that happens uptown.

Our Number One urban priority today is urban mobility, transportation. Because of our aspirations to build a strong, viable, and healthy uptown, we have set off in a new direction as

Minette Trosch has indicated. Knowing that we must have both the public and private sectors working together, CUUDC was the logical organization to take the lead in forming the uptown transportation program.

We know that we must have the commitment to the major corporations in the community, the big employers, and preferably a commitment actually from the chief executive officer. We realize that there was no immediate crisis, and we know that it would be very difficult to rev up the community, particularly the business community, and keep the momentum going. The Charlotte Uptown Development Corporation, the Greater Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, and the Central Charlotte Association with assistance from the city of Charlotte and state of North Carolina sponsored a transportation symposium called a "Communication on Getting You to Work Tomorrow." Ken Orski was invited to be our keynote speaker for that occasion. Limiting our attendance, we sent our special invitations to key corporate individuals; and we received exactly what we wanted, 150 good participants. National experts along with Ken spoke at our general session. The general session was followed by excellent workshop discussions. The symposium ended up with a tremendous amount of interest, excitement, enthusiasm, and cooperation on the part of all participants.

Very shortly after that, we went back to the 150 conferees and asked them to select from five different transportation areas one which they would prefer to serve on. Those five areas were staggered hours/flex time, car/van pooling, parking management, transit system and other options, such as streetcars, taxis, rail and the like. I, personally, handpicked the chairmen who are the key people in community. We picked good vice chairmen and then we set up the committees.

With the chairmen, vice chairmen, and Ken Orski assisting, we had an organizational meeting. We gave the committee chairmen a charge to develop an action plan, but did not tell them how to do it. The 150 participants were assigned to the committees of their choice. Each group was well represented by both the public and private sectors. All committees are now up and running. They are currently developing their mission, objectives, and program of work. In fact, they have already made one report. They will make periodic presentations to our Steering Committee which consists of many of the top chief executive officers in the community. Any ideas that are developed along the way will be set into motion, either across the board or as a pilot operation through a large corporate employer.

Our uptown community is looking ahead and planning for the future. The employers want their employees to be able to get to and from uptown in an easy, efficient way. They, also, want shoppers, tourists, and visitors of all kinds to be able to reach our hotels, Spirit Square Theatre, Discovery Plan Science Museum, and the library. We have a big investment uptown in both property and human beings -- people that make the whole thing go. We have a long way to go, but we have a good start toward meeting our future transportation needs. We have a positive political environment about uptown Charlotte; we have enthusiasm; we have a great communication between public and private sectors; we have involvement with the right people; and we have a commitment by all. I think our results will be very exciting.

HOUSTON

Robert Eury, Executive Director,
Central Houston

In Texas, everybody brags a great deal, and I have always figured that the Dallasites usually claim bragging rights for most things, but I guess we in Houston can claim bragging rights for a phenomenal growth over the last ten years, and probably even though we would like to regret that we have to, we, also, claim bragging rights over congestion. By 1981, our congestion, our peak hour traffic periods were some 7-1/2 hours a day. Why was this the case? The community really could not build the supply side anywhere near as fast as demand increased, and I really challenge any city that was going as fast as Houston to really face up to that situation. As it turns out by 1981, Houston ranked nineteenth out of the twenty most populous areas for the miles of freeway per square mile of urbanized area. There were three immediate responses as the situation began to occur which started in the late seventies and moved into the early eighties. The first response was in the real estate market. There were a number of major corporate relocations. Firms decided, and they heard very clearly from their employees, it is important to get to work in a timely manner, and many firms decided to relocate themselves within the region more proximately to their employees. In fact, one consultant in the local market recorded some 116 relocations in the period 1979 to 1983, and that involved over 13 million square feet of office space. Incidentally, quite a few of those relocations were not from downtown but from other places in the region.

Secondly, several corporations that did not relocate decided it was time to get into the transportation provision process, and very quickly stepped in with a van pool program. Houston very proudly claims bragging rights over the largest van pool fleet in the United States. In 1978, we had some 14 corporations sponsoring about 210 vans. By 1983, this grew to a level of 85 corporate programs with over 1800 vans.

During that same period, with Metro helping to coordinate the process, we formed car pools which now enable 300,000 Houstonians to carpool. Today, over fifty corporations are involved in providing and subsidizing transit passes. All of these are very incremental responses, but they formed a very dramatic response to the congestion situation in Houston on the demand side.

We were aware, while all this was going on, that the roads were still very full, which means that there has to be a response on the supply side. It took a little while for the city to respond, but in 1981 the Houston Chamber of Commerce took the lead in the development of the Houston Regional Mobility Plan which went to the public in the early part of 1982. Most significantly it gave a very clear definition of what the problem was, how serious it was, what it was costing us, what it takes to get the problem solved or at least alleviated -- back to a level of recent past, more importantly what it costs, and maybe even more important than that, what it costs beyond the resources we currently have available.

Under that plan we have seen some action and progress. The Harris County Toll Road Authority has been set up for which last fall the voters approved some 900 million dollar bond issue for user funding -- a toll road authority to do certain freeways and highways within the Houston region. The city of Houston faces this summer the largest general obligation bond issue for all improvements.