

SUMMARY Julie Hoover, Vice President and Director, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Inc.

This is a report of a conference session dealing with citizen advisory committees (CACs), the most frequently-used public involvement technique in transportation today after public meetings. The session was developed because of the Committee on Citizen Participation in Transportation's concern that positive experiences with CACs were not being effectively communicated throughout the transportation industry. It was also believed that both localities considering the establishment of new CACs and those having difficulties with existing ones might benefit from the "lessons learned" of others.

Our report describes experience with seven CACs in five different cities: Austin, Fort Wayne, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Toronto's experimentation with a variation, the focus group, is also discussed.

A wide variety of purpose, structure, and function was found in the committees examined. One was mandated by state law; five were sponsored by an agency, one by an elected official, and one by business; all seven started with appointed members, but two later switched to self-selected, open membership; four were permanent groups with a wide range of interests, three were ad hoc and issue-specific and, finally, four were structured and acted in a fairly formal manner while three were relatively unstructured and informal.

Their common characteristics were commitment to the concept and objectives of citizen participation, and the strong desire, on the part of both sponsor and participants, to make the CACs function successfully. To this end, considerable resources and hard work were often employed.

In conclusion, all of the presenters were enthusiastic supporters of CACs and felt they were definitely bonuses although several qualified their endorsements, mainly by cautioning against sole reliance on CACs for public input and by urging great care in their organization.

Panel moderator Marilyn Skolnick provides the session's introduction, pointing out that despite a lessening of federal support, citizen participation is still very much "alive and well." In the lead article, Bruce McDowell discusses the roles of CACs within the context of a comprehensive citizen participation program, identifies their potential advantages and disadvantages, and describes how benefits of this technique can be maximized and shortcomings minimized.

Experience with the four permanent CACs is then reviewed. Michael Scanlon describes the background and organization of a newly-created CAC in Pittsburgh and discusses some of its activities; he is optimistic about its long range potential to evolve into a well organized advocacy group and serve as a key communication link with the general public. Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, Robert Wooten tells about SEPTA's very interesting and

surprisingly positive experience with a state-required CAC. Although its members are appointed, it is reasonably representative of the population served and has contributed to SEPTA's recent gains in service quality.

Eight important "lessons learned" are identified in Alan Wulkan and Julie Hoover's paper describing how Austin's hard-working CAC and subcommittees helped develop a transit service plan and win voter passage of a measure creating a regional transit authority and a one-cent sales tax totally dedicated to transit. Finally, Diana Scott describes a very successful "rider's advisory council" in Fort Wayne where citizens worked constructively both to plan and gain acceptance for major route changes, and to increase transit ridership generally through an interesting variety of programs and activities.

Wendell Cox next describes three different CACs in the Los Angeles area, all focused on one specific issue and all established on a temporary, ad hoc basis. In each, a small group of committee people developed a substantial understanding of the technical constraints and opportunities, mobilized local political support, and followed the issue through the appropriate public agencies. Concluding the session is a description by Al Gallo of Toronto's experience with a variation of the CAC -- focus groups.

INTRODUCTION Marilyn Skolnick Moderator, Port Authority of Allegheny County Board of Directors.

After many years of hard work on the part of many citizen activists, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1981 adopted guidelines on Citizen Participation in Local Transportation Planning. These guidelines were preceded by the adoption of DOT's Consumer Program. These two programs made it possible for citizens to become directly involved in every aspect of transportation, primarily because U.S. DOT encouraged agencies to provide opportunities for them to do so.

With a changed administration came a change of philosophy, including the idea that less government was a better government, and the thought that the guidelines for citizen participation in local transportation were not necessary. As a result they were immediately rescinded.

There are, as a result, few if any references to citizen participation in the few regulations that have come forth from U.S. DOT since then.

A cloud was cast over the citizen participation movement. Had the concept that evolved over years of hard work come to a screeching halt? Had the entire concept of citizen participation come and gone, even before it could be tested?