

in a timely manner, and that on some issues, they are ignored. Additionally, as with most committees, the bulk of work is accomplished by the more active minority and a serious problem exists in filling vacancies.

More importantly, since 1979, SEPTA has made tremendous gains in service quality. The depths of 1979 have been surpassed and the Authority has achieved a plateau. That achievement in itself is a challenge. To continue to progress will be more difficult. The crisis mentality which forced people to act rather than debate has dissipated. The tendency to wrangle over decisions is greater and the danger that such arguments will not only impede momentum but could begin to unravel the accomplishments of the past is very real.

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES: AUSTIN, TEXAS EXPERIENCE, by Alan Wulkan, Executive Director, Capital Metro Transportation Authority, and Julie Hoover, Vice President and Director, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Inc.

Since 1970, the Austin area has experienced substantial population growth and the 600,000 people now living in the region place enormous demands on its transportation facilities. Today Austin is the fastest growing city in Texas and perhaps the country. However, unlike other larger Texas cities such as Houston and Dallas, Austin has the fewest lane miles of freeway per capita in the state. This has led to congestion and service deficiencies which, without corrective measures, will become more serious as the region continues to grow at a phenomenal rate.

With the passage of statewide legislation in 1981 allowing cities the size of Austin to establish metropolitan transit authorities (MTAs), local officials accelerated their efforts to develop increased and better public transit service. In 1982 the City of Austin, Travis County, and the City of Round Rock combined efforts to organize a citizen's task force to study the feasibility of establishing an MTA in the Austin area. Such action proved highly desirable and in October 1983, the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro) was created. The five-member interim board then quickly established an ambitious schedule to develop a transit service plan, set a rate of sales tax, and conduct a confirmation election. On January 19, the voters of the Austin region overwhelmingly approved Capital metro with 59% of the vote. In great part this success can be attributed to time dedicated to the citizen involvement effort.

From its creation, the Capital Metro Board believed that public acceptability of their transit service plan was essential for the successful passage of the referendum. Thus, they requested that an extensive public involvement program be undertaken throughout the duration of the transit planning process.

The resulting program, which was developed in large part from input by citizens, elected officials, and agency representatives received through an initial series of community leader interviews, included a wide variety of techniques and events. They were carefully selected to provide opportunities for people to contribute to the planning process, and usually thorough efforts were made to obtain the participation of all potentially affected groups and individuals. A unique feature of this program was its emphasis on both a structured citizen committee and the grass roots public, and the ultimate integration of the two.

Capital Metro adopted a policy early in the process that emphasized public meetings as opposed to public hearings. All CAC and grass roots meetings were open exchanges of ideas and problem-solving sessions. Only one public hearing was scheduled in the program. The intent of this policy was to reverse the trend of negative public reactions at public hearings to plans prepared by consultants and staff and presented to the public. Historically the development and environmental communities had opposed each other's plans for improved transportation facilities in Austin. The CAC helped bridge these groups by bringing everyone together to address the City's number one problem -- traffic congestion.

The Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) had over 130 members representing both geographic balance and a broad spectrum of interests in the region including local governments, civic organizations, major employers, businesses, and key opinion leaders. Initially, members were chosen by appointment only but as interest in the committee grew and volunteers came forth, the membership was expanded. Capital Metro was mildly concerned that the group would become too large and unmanageable but, as will be shown later, these fears were unfounded.

During the seven-month planning process, the CAC held six official meetings, each scheduled prior to major decision milestones in the technical study process or after a round of open public meetings. Scheduled on Saturday mornings from 8:30 to noon, the meetings were well-attended (at least half of the entire membership was typically present) and highly productive.

In addition, the CAC had three very active subcommittees which met more frequently and focused intensely on specific aspects of the transit development process. These were:

- ° A Service and Plan Development Subcommittee, which had about 25 members and met over 10 times to review the transit planning work as it was being done. Capital Metro staff and their consultants worked closely with this group, which ultimately produced their own report. In most cases, Metro adopted the subcommittee's recommendations.

- ° A 15-member Financial Committee, which also produced a report of its own. Because the group's membership included financial officers from several leading local companies, prominent state government officials, University of Texas faculty, and representatives from a local accounting

firm, this group's analyses were extremely sophisticated and helpful to Capital Metro. Their recommendations for funding mechanisms included support for 1 cent sales tax, rejection of bonding, and support for 50 percent federal financing.

° Finally, a 15-member Public Information Subcommittee assisted Capital Metro both by reviewing all public information material before it was released and by strategizing and planning for the general public meetings and presentations.

Because the CAC and its subcommittees have been so closely involved in the planning process, they are highly supportive of Capital Metro and its new service plan. The CAC unanimously endorsed the Service plan along with each subcommittee report and recommended strong support both at the public hearing and during the referendum. At Capital Metro's only public hearing on the project, for example, approximately two thirds of the 41 speakers favoring the plan were CAC members; only 4 individuals opposed the plan. Further, after the preferred plan was adopted, CAC members became very active in campaigning for the election. They helped to obtain endorsements, arranged for meetings and speakers, and, sometimes, made presentations on behalf of the plan.

The Austin area has an especially strong tradition of active public involvement in all aspects of government and planning; thus, its specific CAC model may not work as effectively in other parts of the country. There are, however, a number of useful "lessons learned" from the Austin experience which should be helpful to anyone planning to create a citizen's advisory committee. These are:

1. Large committees can be successful if structured properly, and they have the advantages of bringing more people into the process and eliminating potential charges of elitism. Austin's approach of starting with appointments and then changes to open membership ensured that there was both balance and widespread representation. Topic-specific subcommittees proved to be a good vehicle to get more intense citizen interaction and input where it was needed.
2. While having many obvious benefits, CAC's should never be used alone without a simultaneous grass roots effort. Most participation programs focus on one or the other; Austin tried to give equal emphasis to both and encouraged linkages between the two programs. This worked nicely, in part because CAC membership was drawn from the neighborhoods as well as Austin's government, business and civic leadership.
3. It is a good idea to have board members involved in the public participation program. In Austin, the Capital Metro Board attended all the CAC meetings and many neighborhood meetings. Their presence gave the meetings enhanced importance while, simultaneously, the board members became more sensitive to community concerns.

4. Sometimes even the best-intentioned efforts do not produce the desired results, and so a program's sponsors must be flexible and resourceful. One disappointment in the Austin program was underrepresentation of minority participants because they did not have sufficient leaders able to commit substantial amounts of time to the process. Thus, as a supplement to meetings in these communities, Capital Metro employed leadership interviews and on-board transit surveys.

5. Vigorous public involvement can be achieved, even during a short planning process. Such an effort can be extremely draining and creates a stressful environment for the staff and board, however, and is recommended only when absolutely necessary.

6. If your budget can accommodate lots of pots of strong coffee, Saturday mornings appear to be a very good meeting time.

7. By inviting people with applicable skills from business and university communities to become members of a CAC, it is often possible for an agency to get free help and advice. Having committed consultants willing to invest time in after-hours public involvement is also useful.

8. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in order to have a successful CAC, the sponsoring agency must be committed to listening, and must be responsive to the feedback it gets. Capital Metro added routes to their service plan at the suggestion of citizens; routes were also deleted for the same reason. Other community themes which appear in the final service plan include more frequent service, more evening and weekend service, convenient transfers, more park-n-ride and express transit service, better service for the transportation-disadvantaged, and more expeditious implementation of light rail. Because Austin's decision makers made a genuine effort to have their plan be a "people's plan," they now enjoy the support and active assistance of their CAC.

FORT WAYNE RIDERS ADVISORY COUNCIL, by Diana F. Scott, Marketing Manager,
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The Fort Wayne Public Transportation Corporation (PTC) provides public bus service to the cities of Fort Wayne and New Haven, Indiana. The population of the service area is approximately 294,000. The PTC owns and operates a fleet of 65 buses, traveling 25,800 miles per week, Monday through Saturday. Sixty-eight bus operators, 17 maintenance people and 20 management and support personnel are employed by the PTC, which is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor and the City Council.

Recently organized is our Riders Advisory Council, composed of volunteers representative of various segments of the riding public. Their sole