

They helped to promote a televised public hearing for this new service. In November of 1984, PTC introduced a new route structure to complete the modernization of the new system -- these were the first major route changes in ten years, but with the advance public relations work of our advisory group, we received very little opposition from the community. On the introductory day for the new routes, free rides were given throughout the city. The riders advisory members helped to "spread the word" to achieve a rider increase for that day of over 200%. Since November, we have received virtually no criticism from the media or the public, and ridership is beginning to return.

Since the formation of our Riders Advisory Council, its members have attended Board meetings, written and distributed petition letters to federal and state legislators, and most importantly, distributed information to and from their fellow bus riders. They are now working to schedule a new "How to ride the bus" video presentation and are encouraging employee subsidy programs within their businesses. It always help to have an "inside person"!

The formation of a bus riders advisory council has certainly been a bonus for the city of Fort Wayne and its public transit.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY: THE LOS ANGELES EXPERIENCE, by Wendell Cox, Member, Los Angeles County Transportation Commission.

Citizen committees have had a significant influence on transportation policy in Los Angeles County. This presentation will consider the experience of three particularly successful committees, seeking to identify the common elements.

The author was personally involved in each case. This included being chairman of the Mayor's Advisory Committee and the Diamond Lane Advisory Committee. The association with the Ventura Freeway Improvement Coalition was a board member representing the district in which improvements were sought.

The Mayor's San Fernando Valley Advisory Committee on Transportation operates under the auspices of the mayor of Los Angeles. During 1975 and 1976, the Committee faced a number of challenges relating to transit services. Without exception, the Committee was instrumental in obtaining a more favorable result than was proposed by the regional transit agency. The two experiences summarized below are representative of those successes.

In the middle 1970s, the Committee, among others, advocated the establishment of a comprehensive public transit system in the San Fernando Valley, a suburban sector of Los Angeles with more than one million residents. Such a system was implemented in 1975

Within 60 days the transit operator announced plans to cancel all newly established evening service, due to low patronage. The Committee felt that the service had not been given enough time to develop acceptable patronage levels.

A campaign was begun to save as much of the service as possible. Members of the Committee attempted to learn about bus planning in a short period of time, and formulated an alternative plan. That plan called for the reduction of night service by 40 percent, while saving 60 percent in costs. The alternative plan was presented to the Committee, to the considerable surprise of transit planners, who had not previously witnessed a citizens group effectively involved in service planning.

Beyond formulating an alternative plan, the Committee worked closely with state legislators, city council members, county supervisors and the mayor to obtain political support. This encouraged the transit operator to develop an approach which reduced service even less than the Committee had proposed.

Somewhat later, the Committee sought restructuring of three bus lines, in order to improve access between the community of Sylmar and the rest of the San Fernando Valley. This community was served by a short "U" shaped line, which included a mid route layover. Two other lines terminated at this same layover point. Sylmar riders needed up to two transfers to make trips in the Valley, while no more than one was required from other Valley communities. The Committee obtained a meeting with top transit agency planners, and suggested that the two legs of the "U" be instead connected to the two lines which terminated at the mid-route layover. This would reduce the maximum number of transfers to one. The Committee had studied route operations well enough to have learned that the "U" shaped line was being operated with one more bus than was necessary, since at least two buses were routinely at the layover point.

The transit planners sympathized with Committee members, and expressed regret that they could not comply, because it would require an additional vehicle, which was not available. Committee members suggested using the extra vehicle on the "U" shaped line. The meeting recessed, with the planners exiting to review the line. Soon they returned with the admission that there was such an extra bus. Not too much later, the "U" shaped line was combined with other lines, not in the way the Committee had proposed, but in a manner which meet Committee objectives.

The Committee achieved these successes, and others, with a small group of dedicated people who invested the time necessary to become conversant both with technical and planning issues, and with the political situation. When necessary, large contingents were produced at public meetings.

At the same time as the Committee was successful in preserving services in the San Fernando Valley, other less organized communities were unable to forstall service reductions similar to those which had been proposed for the Valley. The involvement of the Mayor's Committee made a material difference in public transportation.

In 1976, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) established an advisory committee to assist in the implementation of a high occupancy vehicle lane (Diamond Lane) on Interstate 405, the San Diego Freeway.

To understand the role played by the Committee, the political situation and characteristics of the proposal are reviewed. Four months before Caltrans had established a diamond Lane on the Santa Monica Freeway, which had been removed from general use. This reduction of general capacity met with extremely negative public reaction. Sometime after the formation of the Committee, the Santa Monica Freeway lane was returned to general use, as a result of a court order.

The proposed project had technical problems as well. The lane was proposed only in one direction, so that users would face no improvement in the other direction. Further, much of the lane would have been located in Sepulveda Pass, which as a long uphill grade, restricting bus speeds to about 25 miles an hour. The prospect of slow moving buses obstructing the movement of carpools and vanpools made the lane of questionable value even in the one direction.

In the first meeting, Caltrans advised the Committee that they were seeking assistance in project implementation, and no advice on whether or not to implement the project. This caused some members to threaten withdrawal, unwilling to participate because the critical project decision had already been made. Other committee members successfully argued that the project could be better fought from within than from outside the process. The Committee advised Caltrans that it would operate on the understanding that the project decision was a legitimate issue for discussion.

Members of the Committee spent long hours in meeting with Caltrans officials, becoming familiar with the technical issues. They raised questions and challenged assumptions. After a couple of months, it became clear that there was little justification in proceeding with this project, at least not until the lane could be opened in both directions.

Once this decision was made, the focus moved to mobilizing the political support necessary to cancel the diamond lane plans and open the now completed lane to all traffic. The local press and electronic media were contacted at appropriate times. Under normal circumstances, it might have been fatal to openly challenge the agency which had delivered the committee's mandate. However, the substantial public opposition which had been mobilized by the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lane, gave the committee considerable leverage. Soon the lane was opened to all traffic.

As with the Mayor's Committee, a small group of people had obtained an understanding of the technical issues, and had mobilized political and media support to supplement its position.

The Ventura Freeway Improvement Coalition was established by business organizations in the San Fernando Valley to seek capacity enhancements along the Ventura Freeway (US 101).

This freeway stretches for 25 miles through the San Fernando Valley, and includes the busiest section of freeway in the state. Several widening projects were sought, as was construction of a new interchange. These improvements were sought at a time of unprecedented funding scarcity in the California highway program. When the Coalition began its efforts, none of its proposed projects were programmed.

Coalition members spent substantial time with Caltrans engineers, to identify low capital means for improving freeway capacity. They contacted funding agencies to acquire a working knowledge of both the financial resources available and the project approval process.

The Coalition developed its own program for improvement of the freeway, and began to seek support from other community groups, and from local and state elected officials. After considerable effort, they received Los Angeles County Transportation Commission approval of some projects in 1981, when none had been proposed either by Commission or Caltrans staff. They obtained this approval while no other new projects were added to the county program. Efforts continued at the California State Transportation Commission, where a negative decision was successfully appealed. The next year additional projects received local approval of the interchange was obtained, after considerable discouragement from the state level. Nearly the entire program which the Coalition originally proposed has been approved, and some parts have been completed.

What makes this success so unique is that, while the Coalition was receiving approvals, there were no similar successes in other parts of the county.

Again, a small group of committee people had developed a substantial understanding of the technical issues, mobilized local political support and followed the issue through the appropriate public agencies. The Coalition had made an important difference in transportation policy.

Seven elements are common to the successes described above.

1. Each committee focused upon a unifying issue which had broad appeal, and against which there was no well-organized opposition. In a sense, these successes were situational. For example, the Mayor's Committee has assumed a low profile in recent years because unifying issues have not been present. The Diamond Land Committee passed out of existence after the project was cancelled. Doubtless the Ventura Freeway Coalition will operate only so long as its projects require attention.
2. In Each case, much of therefore was undertaken by a smalll, committee group of people. When necessary, that group mobilized large numbers of supporters for public meetings.

3. The committees developed an understanding of technical issues, funding, the planning process and the political and media environment.
4. Each committee developed alternative plans which better addressed their interests than those proposed by the public agencies. The routinely questioned assumptions, and their familiarity with the issues gave them considerable credibility before public bodies and the media.
5. The committees skillfully sought and utilized the assistance of political offices and the media.
6. There was an understanding of the limitations of the committee. The committees were careful not to become exposed in a manner which detracted from their credibility. They were careful not to call for large turnouts of members excepts when absolutley necessary. The concentrated upon well-timed and high impact initiatives.
7. They were patient. All of the committees suffered temporary setbacks. Sometimes they achieved only partial victories. The leadership did not lost heart, accepted partial victories or setbacks, regrouped and again sought fell program approval.

These three cases illustrate the potential for citizens committees to impact transportation polity. Because of the Mayor's Committee, transit service levels are higher then they would have otherwise been in the San Fernando Valley. Because of the Diamond Lane Committee, the additional Lane on the San Diego Freeway was quickly opened to general use. And because of the Diamond Lane Committee, the additional Lane on the San Diego Freeway was quickly opened to general use. And because of the Ventura Freeway Improvement Coalition, commuters are reaching their destinations sooner than before. In each case, the committees became so conversant in the technical, planning and politcal issues that they achieved formidable credibility as participants in the public planning process. They were able to successfully challenge strident agency position, and even to reverse policy decisions.

Citizen participation can substantially impact transportation policy. For a citizens committee to be successful, members must be prepared to not only work hard, but also to work skillfully. Certainly, a committee needs an issue around which to organize. However, what distinguishes these committees from those less successful is that they developed their own programs, and did so in a manner which obtained public notice. In short, they made their own way.