

## KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

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### A PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

Brian W. Clymer, Federal Transit Administration

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I wanted to talk a little bit about what transportation planning is, and so I've confined my remarks to my simplistic view of what planning is all about as sort of my charge to you to begin this conference.

Planners play an important role, but sometimes that's a role that is misunderstood. I may be wrong on this, but I don't think that there are probably any urban planners in America today, either transportation or otherwise, who hold their office on the basis of a popular election. I think we can certainly accept as an axiom that only public officials who make real decisions in our country are those who are held accountable at the ballot box. And yet there's some kind of a continuing mythology that sees planners as somehow or other being the behind the scenes people who make the real decisions and somehow that's done in secret. Planners are not the decision makers, and obviously they never should be. They recommend, they have views and opinions, and I think it's probably safe to say we probably all know a planner or two who has had a few strongly held views and opinions.

But when you boil it all down, the people with the real accountability in public life hold their jobs by virtue of the ballot box. They are not planners. Planners provide assistance to these public officials. Planners provide the information that public officials need and hopefully use when they make their decisions. I think this is a pretty fundamental truth in my view, and yet it's one we tend to get very confused about all too often. Planners provide information for decision makers to use. Planning can be called good planning when the quality and the quantity of information that it provides is appropriate for the nature of the decision that's about to be made. You can have insufficient information, you can have inappropriate information, you can have irrelevant information, and it takes absolutely no genius at all to provide too much information. And yet each of these situations can be as bad as the other three. Each can result in a poorly made decision. The planner's responsibility ends though once the information has been assembled, distilled and presented. The work of the planner is measured by professional criteria and professional standards. The work of the decision maker as an elected official is measured by political standards, and I use that term in its very best and fundamental sense. Let me propose an analogy to explain what I think

good transportation planning is all about. The analogy I will use is the purchase of a new automobile. You can walk into any showroom from coast to coast and the first salesman that you meet will be more than happy to sell you the first car you laid eyes on and tell you why that's exactly the right car for you. "Listen, you like that yellow sports car? I can put you in it right now." Well if you've got 20 or 30 big ones, then you can go right ahead and buy it. But if you are like most of us, when you get serious about buying a car, you do exactly that, you get serious, unless of course you're 16 years old and all you care is that it has 300 horsepower and it's red. But the first thing you decide is why you need the car at all, what it's going to be used for in other words. If you're going to use the car to haul firewood to market two or three times a week, you probably don't want a luxury sedan. If the car has to take three or four kids and sports equipment to games and practice all the time, then a snappy two seater probably isn't going to fit the demand either. If you do a lot of off-the-road driving up and down country hillsides, then chances are a convertible isn't what you're looking for. If the budget is going to be real tight the next couple of years, then you may want to look at compacts and economy models. You even have to see the whole question of purpose in a temporal dimension. Families get bigger, they get older, kids move out. The needs and purposes may change over the life of the car that you're thinking about buying. But you define your purpose and you narrow down your options and that's step number one.

Now it's decision time. You need some good solid information. You need a transportation planner in other words. When you're buying a car, maybe your planner turns out to be your brother-in-law Fred, or Charley the guy two houses down, or back issues of some automobile magazines in the local library, or maybe even all three. Maybe you even put in a call to Click and Clack, the Tappett Brothers on public radio. But in short, you see what you can do to find some basic information about makes and models of vehicles that satisfy the purpose you've identified. And even after you've defined your purpose, you still don't just walk in the showroom and let the salesman sell you something. You learn what you can about gas mileage, maintenance history, resale value, safety features, financing options and cost, the whole nine yards. In the end of course it's your decision because you're the decision maker. You can draw reasonable conclusions from the information that the planners have given you or you can forget about it and rely on pure intuition and then live with whatever choice

you happen to make. But the point I want to make in drawing this analogy is the relationship of good information to good decision making. A further point about transportation planning is that it really consists of that range of information a public official needs to make an informed decision about what kind of an investment is appropriate to achieve a particular purpose. The purpose has to be identified first though. What's the problem for which your proposed course of action is the most appropriate solution. In fact that's backwards and that's exactly what's wrong so often. We must never begin with the proposed solution, whether it's that yellow sports car in the showroom floor with the big price, or a new light rail line that also has a big price tag. We have to begin with the problem. You must know what the problem is you're trying to solve before you try to solve it. Anyone can look out the window in any big city and see a lot of traffic congestion and the effects of air pollution. No mayor has to hire a staff with a lot of people with fancy academic degrees to learn something that any 12 year old already knows.

But every mayor probably needs some professional assistance to understand precisely why there's congestion and precisely why there's air pollution. Is it because of too many work trips into the downtown? Is it because of too little road space or not enough rapid transit or is it something else that is the root cause of the problem; something that's hard to know without surveys, transit and traffic counts, inventories, and other professional diagnostic measurements.

Once we do know the problem though, then we can look at some options. But when looking for ways to solve a particular problem, it makes no sense whatsoever to assume that there's only one correct way to solve that problem. If we want to get the maximum bang from our transportation investment dollar, we have to assess a full range of reasonable options and we have to do it objectively. When we evaluate our options, we have to keep in mind that the information we deal with must be understandable and it has to be accurate. No attempts should be made to skew it in favor of one option or another. Most importantly, the information should speak to how well each of the options does in achieving the goals and objectives we set out to reach in the first place.

Now, as introduced, I am an accountant by profession. So I would like to deal with some facts and figures, but I also recognize that there are some public policy goals and objectives that are not so easy to quantify as others. You might call these quality of life issues. They can and must be addressed because they are a very real part of the picture. But keep in mind that elected decision makers don't need as much help from

professionals and professional transportation planners when they're dealing with this non-quantitative side of things. In fact, maybe they don't need any help at all. Maybe this is something that they should reserve entirely for themselves. What they do need though are people who can tell them how much various options cost and what they are likely to accomplish in the ways that the professional is able to measure and determine.

It's difficult to make trade-offs between quantitative goals and qualitative ones. It's especially difficult to do when money is tight which I think it virtually always is. So money matters, even when the money comes from the government. But trade-offs have to happen and the relationship between quantitative and qualitative goals is a good analogy for the relationship between professional planning and ultimate political decision making.

We have to be careful about what information is presented to decision makers. But we also have to be careful how it is presented. Data should be scaled in a way that decision makers and citizens who may not be technical experts can understand. It's not enough to give a mayor, a board chair, or a county council person some esoteric evaluation criteria. There must also be a way of expressing important quantitative information in a way in which people can relate to and in a way that relates to the real world.

ISTEA has indeed changed the transportation planning in the United States. There are those who think that the only profound changes are about modal flexibility and planning emphasis and I disagree with that. In fact, I would say that perhaps the most profound new thing in the whole ISTEA is that it changes the relationships among the state DOTs, transit operators, MPOs and the people that ultimately employ them, our customers, the citizens. ISTEA calls for all relevant planning, programming, and implementing institutions to enter new and cooperative relationships. I know that in the last six months all of you have been busy doing just exactly that.

But while you're busy crafting all these new relationships, please recognize that ISTEA calls for explicit citizen involvement and private sector involvement at every step of the process that you're building. This isn't going to be easy and you are the ones that will have to figure out how to get this participation started and how to keep it going and how to make it work. But citizens and their organizations must be part of the evaluation of options and they must work with the professionals to determine what criteria to use and why. The challenge is yours.

These issues were struggled with several weeks ago when many of you gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina under the auspices of TRB to discuss implementing the

ISTEA. This meeting here in Seattle is really the "Dream Team" of transportation planners. It represents as far as I can tell the very first time that AASHTO, APTA, NARC, TRB and various representatives of the environmental community have gathered under one roof to discuss a common planning agenda.

The tasks at hand are not going to be easy because the problems we face don't lend themselves to easy

solutions. As you deliberate the processes that we're going to use to face these issues, please keep in mind a few suggestions. Figure out the problem first and have some vision. There are lots of alternatives out there, find out which ones make sense. Don't be exclusively quantitative, but remember money does indeed matter. And finally, don't try to do it alone. Listen, listen to what people out there are saying. Thank you very much.

### **A NEW ERA IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING**

Thomas D. Larson, Federal Highway Administration

Early in my career I heard a speaker at Penn State, Dr. Eric Walker, who was the President of Penn State. He went on to become the first President of the National Academy of Engineering, and subsequently Vice President for Research for Alcoa. The thing that I remember the most about Eric Walker is the talk that he gave at two or three commencement addresses. He said the world is divided into three kinds of people. There are the undertakers, the people that do a job so poorly that it dies under them and has to be buried. Secondly there is the broad middle class of caretakers, and there are lots of those. As a matter of fact, whether we like it or not, most of us probably fall into the category of caretakers most of the time. We kind of move the dust balls around a little bit. Finally there are a few, just a very few, innovators that make all the difference.

Eric Walker in his speech talked about innovators and said that these are people who suffer a persistent itch, an irritation with the way things are, and they are never satisfied. They know that it can be better and they know that if they are just turned loose, they can make a difference.

I've never forgotten this little story by Eric Walker. I believe that we need innovators in America and the reason I'm so enthused about being here is because in this room, there are probably more transportation innovators than you could put together in any one setting or that have ever been together in the recent past. I know a very large number of you and I know that the innovation skills are here to make a difference in the future of this country.

It's appropriate that we are in Seattle. As I flew out on a Boeing 737 this afternoon, I thought about the aircraft industry here in Seattle. This industry has been innovative to a point of being world leaders and the leading edge of our export trade. In an industry that is

clearly one of the most demanding in terms of technology in the whole world, the Boeing Company has in fact been a world leader that has allowed us to prosper as a nation in unique ways.

Not only has industry been innovative here, the City of Seattle, in its approach to transit and land use, has been uniquely innovative in the country. Under Duane Berentson, the State of Washington, and the Washington Department of Transportation have been innovative. You should know if you don't that Duane is the second ranking member of that club called the CAOs of the Departments of Transportation. I know personally the kind of innovation that Duane has brought to this department. He didn't come to this position as a career transportation person. He was Chairman of the House Legislative Body in Washington, Speaker of the House, and really had reached eminence in the political world before he transferred into this world of ours, the world of transportation. So he was innovative in terms of his career, and brought that innovative spirit to transportation.

Some of the fruits of that innovation are clearly evident and you will see them and experience them while you are here. They can be seen in the state legislation that ties transportation and land use together. Growth management legislation exists here in Washington. It is something that most of us talk about but can never bring to reality because we say it's impossible. Here they've made it a reality.

The thing that I think is most interesting though that Duane has done is to take the ISTEA legislation very, very seriously. He picked out some of his very best people and said you folks are going to be the ISTEA interpreters for us. He locked them up and threw away the key, from what he says, and they've been struggling to figure out all the nuances of this legislation and how it can work for Washington. That's exactly what the Congress and this Administration intended. This innovative legislation is a tool to be taken seriously and put into motion by people like Duane Berentson that believe that new things are possible.