

TABLE 1 U.S. HOV FACILITIES AND ISTEA FUNDING BY FHWA REGION (OCTOBER 1992)

Region	HOV facilities (lane-miles)			ISTEA funds (\$ thousands)	
	Planned	Construction	Operational	Total	CMAQ
1	141	37	27	1,200	300
3	134	54	127	90,500	0
4	306	29	140	0	2,458
5	96	0	22	1,770	0
6	21	30	46	8,546	0
7	0	0	0	0	0
8	9	9	13	2,000	0
9	1,064	12	263	0	0
10	124	39	70	107,731	0
Total	1,895	210	708	211,747	2,758

### The Emerging Role of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

*Jon Williams*

*Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments*

I would like to discuss the impact of the ISTEA on the metropolitan planning process and the implications for HOV facility development. I would like to start by providing an overview of metropolitan and regional planning in the United States.

In 1990, the U.S. population was approximately 240 million people, with some 78 percent residing in metropolitan areas. The number of people living in metropolitan areas has increased from approximately 40 million in 1920 to 190 million in 1990. Over the same time period, the population in non-metropolitan areas has declined.

Metropolitan areas in the U.S. are characterized by a complex and often overlapping structure of county, municipal, sub-regional, and state governments. This often makes it difficult to find metropolitan solutions to metropolitan problems. In the area of transportation, the federal government has recognized the need for regional coordination, and since 1962 has required an urban transportation planning process in each metropolitan area. The agencies that coordinate this regional planning process are known as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). I am going to assume that we all share the belief that some form of metropolitan coordination is desirable for transportation planning and that we share the same primary goal to find cost-effective solutions to our transportation problems.

The ISTEA has transformed the practice of transportation planning in the United States. There are a number of key features of the ISTEA from an MPO perspective. First, there is additional federal funding available from the

Transportation Trust Fund. About 30 percent more funding is available from previous years and a higher percentage of these funds are allocated to MPO planning activities. The overall level of funding available to MPOs has increased by about 75 percent. It appears that the work load for MPOs has increased by some 125 percent, however, so I am not sure how well MPOs really come out with the new legislation.

A second significant feature of the ISTEA is the addition of flexible funding categories. These have changed the entire character of the metropolitan transportation program. Whereas previously the Interstate Program had a relatively inflexible character, there is now far more flexibility in the types of solutions metropolitan areas can use to address transportation problems.

Third, the ISTEA has given project selection responsibilities in many funding categories to the MPOs in consultation with the states. This is a big change from the past, when MPOs were often viewed as just rubber-stamping state plans. This responsibility is somewhat controversial with the implementing agencies. In the final analysis, it appears that the ISTEA gives local governments a greater opportunity to influence which projects are built and operated through the MPO process.

Several of the new planning and program requirements are especially important. One is the need to have a realistic financial program for how the regional plan will be implemented. This constraint was not imposed previously, and thus many plans were often unrealistic. Second, the public participation requirement ensures that the public will be provided with direct participation in the entire planning process. Third, the congestion management system requirement directs the MPO, in consultation with the state, to incorporate demand reduction and operational management strategies into the regional plan.

This requirement is even stronger in air quality non-attainment areas. In those areas, federal funds may not be used for projects which increase highway capacity, unless they are part of an approved Congestion Management Plan. Further, MPOs must ensure conformity between the transportation plan and the air quality plan in non-attainment areas. Also, the MPO planning area must include the non-attainment area. In some cases, this may substantially increase the geographic area covered by the MPO.

The ISTEA has a number of implications for the MPO planning process. As I have noted, the MPO planning area may be expanded to match the air quality non-attainment area boundaries. The MPO area may also be expanded because the ISTEA requires that it matches the area expected to be urbanized within the next 20 years. This provides a more comprehensive geographic scope for the planning process.

The act also requires increased coordination between the planning activities of state, regional, and local agencies. In metropolitan areas, the ISTEA requires that six management systems be developed by the state in cooperation with the MPO. The six management systems are: bridge, pavement, highway safety, public transportation facilities, intermodal transportation facilities, and congestion management. The MPO is the lead agency in the development of congestion management plans. Also, since MPOs have increased responsibility for project selection and since there is much more flexibility in how funds can be programmed, the MPO becomes the focus for competing interests to negotiate project and program desires.

This in turn leads to a greater interest in the MPO planning process. In many areas, representatives from additional agencies and groups are now participating in the MPO process. For example, at WASHCOG, new members include representatives from the transit authority, state legislatures, and smaller local governments. The by-laws have had to be rewritten to accommodate these changes, and new voting procedures have been implemented. Finally, the ISTEA contains specific language guaranteeing that public interest groups are included in the development of the different plans and at all stages in the project selection process. To accommodate this requirement, a public comment period, public forums to discuss major plans and projects, and a public advisory group have all been established at WASHCOG.

The ISTEA obviously creates some exciting opportunities for MPOs and for metropolitan planning. For example, there is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between land use, environmental concerns, and transportation plans and programs. The increased flexibility under ISTEA allows the selection of projects that may advance land use planning objectives, clean air planning goals, and land use actions that will create transit- and

pedestrian-friendly environments. There is almost a mandate in the ISTEA for the MPOs and the states to shift from an emphasis on developing the transportation system to managing and preserving existing facilities. Further, there is an opportunity to promote bicycle and pedestrian projects, historic preservation projects, and to select, fund, and build high-leverage intermodal projects. The flexibility features of the act permit selection of projects that could have a very high pay-off, including HOV projects and HOV facilities.

I would like to talk briefly about how the ISTEA may influence the decision to implement HOV projects in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Prior to the adoption of the ISTEA in 1991, many metropolitan areas had initiated plans that included major investments in HOV facilities. These projects were a response to the inadequacy of traditional capacity expansions needed to meet forecast demand, funding shortages, environmental concerns, and other factors that supported the movement of people rather than vehicles. In addition, ISTEA gives encouragement to HOV projects at the metropolitan and state level. Aspects of the act favoring HOV projects include 90 percent funding through the Interstate Maintenance Program and the congestion management requirements.

Currently, there are a number of HOV lanes in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Freeway HOV facilities include the barrier-separated lanes on the Shirley Highway, the concurrent flow HOV lanes on I-95, and the I-66 facility. Two short arterial street HOV lanes are also in operation in Alexandria, Virginia. The programmed HOV lanes include extensions to the Shirley Highway HOV facility and the Dulles Toll Road HOV lanes. A number of other facilities are also being proposed. One might question whether all of these are cost-effective projects that will have public support.

The Dulles Toll Road HOV lanes provide a recent example of a project that did not have strong public support. The 12-mile facility was opened on September 1, 1992. Within a month there had been a large public outcry against the project and the United States Congress had become involved. On October 5, 1992, the state of Virginia withdrew the HOV restriction for a year. This represents an experience that most people would like to prevent recurring in the Washington, D.C. area and elsewhere.

With this experience in mind, I would like to close by discussing a few considerations for HOV development in light of the ISTEA requirements and the new MPO responsibilities. First, transportation planning should be based on examining alternatives, not promoting predetermined results. HOV facilities may not always be the best solution and they should not be promoted in these

situations. Second, in those cases where HOV lanes are the best solution, the public must be educated and their support should be sought for the facilities. Resources need to be allocated from project funds for this purpose. Third, HOV facilities need to be designed and operated in a safe and enforceable manner. Fourth, HOV systems should be planned that include park-and-ride lots, transit services, enforcement, and employer programs as integral components. Fifth, priority treatments may take many forms and could include ramp meter bypass lanes, congestion pricing, and bus-only lanes.

There is a danger that funds may be allocated to HOV lanes because it is the easy thing to do, rather than the right thing to do. The MPO will play a critical role in helping to identify cost-effective HOV projects. The MPO's project selection responsibility for the flexible programs is very important in this regard. This does not give them independent powers, however, as MPOs are primarily a forum for state and local discussion. Rather, it suggests two ways that MPOs can be helpful. First, MPOs provide an opportunity to involve all groups in the metropolitan area in the planning and project selection process. Second, MPOs have the potential to ensure that system planning occurs and that narrow-based unpopular projects with inadequate supporting facilities are not funded.

Currently, MPOs and others are just beginning to discover how to take advantage of many of the new programs and the flexibility offered by the ISTEA. It appears that MPOs have the potential to make the planning and design process a rigorous one that will produce successful HOV projects and programs.

## **Maximizing the Benefits of the ISTEA**

*Peter Peyser*

*Peyser Associates, Inc.*



I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for the opportunity to provide an update on a number of elements related to the ISTEA and the HOV Coalition. The credit for many of the ISTEA provisions related to HOV facilities goes to the members of the HOV Coalition. The coalition is a public/private organization established in 1989 to advocate HOV projects at the national level. Members include Seattle Metro, Denver RTD, Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, The American Bus Association, and Greyhound Lines.

The HOV Coalition promoted several goals during the development of the ISTEA. Three critical elements stand out. The first was to provide preferential matching ratios for HOV projects. The 90 percent federal matching ratio in the Interstate Maintenance Program certainly reflects this preferential treatment for HOV projects. The set-aside provision for transportation enhancements within the act further supports the development of HOV projects. The coalition also pushed for a special category of funding for HOV projects. The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program reflects many of these concerns. Third, the coalition supported broad eligibility for HOV projects. The coalition promoted the inclusion of HOV projects in the different categories within the highway and the transit programs. I think this goal was also accomplished, as HOV projects are mentioned in many parts of the ISTEA.

As noted by other speakers, an important reason for this approach was the link to the Clean Air Act Amend-