

Federal Transit Administration Programs



*Lawrence L. Schulman
Federal Transit Administration*

Thank you. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to help open this conference. I would like to provide you with an overview of the background and current status of the transit research program. I also bring greetings from the FTA Administrator Brian Clymer. As many of you know, Brian has been a strong supporter of reestablishing a federal transit research program, including technology development.

The federal transit research program changed significantly with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The program is now more complex, but it is also more meaningful than it was previously. The new structure provides improved flexibility, reliability, and predictability in the financing and conducting of transit research and development. The program is modeled after both the Federal Highway Research Program and the recommendations contained in the Transportation Research Board's Strategic Transit Research Report No. 213.

The program, now called the Transit Planning and Research Program, has five major components. The first is the National Program, which receives 30 percent of the total funding. The second element is the State Program, which receives 10 percent of the total funding. The Transit Cooperative Research Program receives 10 percent, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) receive 45 percent, and the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) receives 5 percent. Finally, the National Transit Institute is funded at a \$3 million level.

The National Program is focused on two basic elements. The first is the Technology Development Program. By congressional direction, this program is advised by a Federal Advisory Committee on Transit Technology. The second part of the program focuses on projects of national significance. To obtain guidance on developing this part of the program, FTA has organized a series of transit planning and research workshops. Three workshops have been held over the last two years to help identify the areas of emphasis for the National Program. Funding for the National Program is available from the pooled resources of Sections 6, 8, Special Studies, 10, 11, and 20.

The Federal Advisory Committee on Transit Technology is comprised of a variety of individuals representing suppliers, operators, and academic institutions. By law, a majority of the committee must represent suppliers. The purpose of the committee is to give guidance and make recommendations on the types of projects that should be examined in the technology area. The committee is a very useful mechanism for providing guidance on technology projects.

The State Program represents a significant new element in the overall research program. In the past, Section 8 funding has been available to states for planning activities. The new program provides resources for planning, research, demonstrations, and managerial training activities. Funds for this program are apportioned directly to the states. In addition, the ISTEA expands the flexibility of highway planning and research funding, specifically mentioning transit.

The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) represents the reintroduction of a significant federal research component. It is geared toward operator problem solving. The TRB report clearly identified the need for a research program focusing on operational issues and problems. The TCRP is modeled after the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP). A separate organization, called the Transit Development Corporation (TDC), will help identify potential research projects. Representatives from operating agencies comprise a majority of the members on the TDC. The recommended projects are passed along to TRB, which implements and manages the selected research projects.

The American Public Transit Association (APTA) will be responsible for distributing the research results, final reports, and other information from the TCRP projects. At this time, the program is well underway. The agreements between the different organizations have been finalized and funding for the first year has been obtained. Two meetings of the TDC have been held and some 12 projects, totaling \$7.6 million, have been identified for the first year of the program.

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) receive some 45 percent of the total program funding to support metropolitan planning activities. These funds are apportioned through the states to the MPOs. Funding, which is determined by a population-based formula, is available for balanced and comprehensive planning involving land use and all transportation modes, alternative analyses, and the normal kinds of programming activities. In addition, these funds can be used to support some of the new requirements and programs of the ISTEA.

The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) remains basically the same. The two major components of the RTAP program are the state component and the national component. The national program includes the national resource center, the peer-to-peer matching program, and the development of training mod-

ules. The state component provides funding for a variety of training activities.

The National Transit Institute is a new element in the transit research program. The Institute will be involved in developing and conducting training programs, maintaining a catalog of existing courses, and providing referrals for nationwide training opportunities. The program will be managed by Rutgers University. A variety of training opportunities will be provided, focusing on all aspects of transit.

In addition to these programs, the ISTEA contains a number of other provisions relating to transit. The first of these is the state oversight requirements. All states with rapid rail, LRT, and people mover systems must establish a state oversight program. An agency must be designated and approved to monitor the implementation of the safety program and to investigate hazardous conditions. If these requirements are not met by 1995, the Secretary of Transportation can hold back up to 5 percent of the Section 9 funds. The specific elements of the requirements are currently being developed by FTA and three hearings have been held to provide input. By law, the final regulations must be issued by December 1992.

The Charter Bus Demonstration Program provides for up to four demonstration projects permitting transit operators to provide charter services to meet transit needs that otherwise would not be served in a cost-effective and efficient manner. Based on the results of the demonstrations, implementation guidelines will be developed in consultation with a board comprised of both public and private interests. An evaluation report on these projects must be submitted to Congress by December 1994.

The ISTEA authorized a Turnkey Procurement Feasibility Demonstration. A notice to solicit proposals was issued in the August *Federal Register* and two demonstration projects will be selected before the end of the year. A set of guidelines on turnkey procurement will be issued based on the results of the demonstrations.

A demonstration project focusing on suspended light rail system technology was also required in the ISTEA. The purpose of this demonstration is to assess technology and to determine the costs and benefits associated with the use of individual vehicles operating on a prefabricated, elevated steel guideway. The initial phase of the demonstration provides not less than \$1 million for up to three competitively selected entities. If it is determined that one of the projects is feasible, FTA may enter into a full funding contract to develop the system.

The ISTEA also provided funding for an Advanced Technology and Electric Vehicle Demonstration Program. Twelve million dollars was provided for this initiative, which focuses on the development of an advanced transportation system for electric vehicles in serial production. The program was announced in February and proposals were submitted in May. It is anticipated that three consortia will be selected in the near future.

ISTEA added three new National University Transportation Centers to the existing ten Centers. Further, the five University Research Institutes are also part of the network of resources available to the transit community. The mission of this program is to advance U.S. technology and expertise through education, research, and technology transfer.

In terms of funding, \$1 billion is authorized for research and planning over a six-year period. This should provide for more stability and predictability in the program. A six-year plan is being developed to help focus the program. However, as many of you know, authorization and appropriation are two different activities. The appropriations have not been at the anticipated level, creating some problems in implementing the different programs. This has been further complicated by the extensive earmarking of specific projects by Congress. This reduces flexibility for the total program.

In Fiscal Year 1992, from the national program of \$35 million, \$20 million was earmarked by Congress. This leaves a \$15 million

discretionary program for FTA to administer. Over the past few years approximately \$20 million has been spent on this program, so the actual funding level is lower than in previous years. As I will explain in a minute, funds from other programs are being used to help support the research and development program to ensure that the priority projects are conducted. These extra funds will probably not be available in the future, however. It also appears that Congress will not appropriate the full 3 percent for the 1993 budget.

I would next like to highlight the major elements of the National Program. The priority workshops have been very helpful in identifying potential projects for this program. Overall, the program is divided into the following 11 program elements.

- Americans with Disabilities Act/Transit Accessibility
- Advanced Public Transportation Systems
- Clean Air
- Financing
- Human Resources
- Information Dissemination
- Regional Mobility/Congestion Management
- Safety/Security
- Technology Development
- Planning & Project Development Studies
- Policy Studies

I would like to focus for a moment on the elements of the Advanced Public Transportation Systems (APTS) program. This represents the transit component of the Department's IVHS program. The objective of the APTS program is to improve transit through conducting operational tests and evaluations of innovative applications of advanced navigation, information, and communication technology. Program elements include technology assessments, research on technology adaptations, development of user and system standards, operational tests, evaluations, technology transfer, GPS system tracking, and the Smart Traveler and Smart Vehicle concepts.

A variety of potential applications have been suggested and are currently being explored.

Elements such as automated fare collection, traffic signal priority, HOV lane use verification, and computer aided dispatching are being examined. Enhancing information dissemination through home and work multimodal information systems, dynamic rideshare matching, automatic vehicle location and monitoring, automated customer information, and wayside and in-vehicle service information are all being explored. Pricing strategies, such as third party billing and road pricing, are also being considered.

Other components of the overall National Program may also be of interest. For example, the Clean Air element focuses on improving the understanding of the impacts of alternative fuels and providing technical assistance to the transit industry in the transition to the use of alternative fuels. The Financing program is examining new methods of financial planning and management, and promoting innovative financing strategies. These programs—and elements of many of the others—will involve the development, application, and evaluation of new technologies to improve transit management and operation.

I would like to close by providing a brief summary of FTA's current funding priorities. Some \$60 million is being spent in FY 1992 on transit research and development, by supplementing the appropriations with additional funding. This is an indication of the Administrator's commitment to research and development activities. The largest element of the program is technology development, which is being funded at approximately \$25 million for FY 1992. Looking at the funding picture from a slightly different perspective, 52 percent of the available funding is being spent on technology development in all the different elements, 36 percent on information dissemination and evaluation, and 12 percent on innovative methods. Unfortunately, ability to continue to fund the program at these levels is uncertain. Thus, it is important that the full amount authorized for transit planning and research in the ISTEA be appropriated.

In concluding, I would like to thank George Mason University for assisting with the develop-

ment of the graphics used in this presentation. I would also like to thank TRB and the Program Steering Committee for their work in putting this conference together. I hope you find the next three days to be informative and productive. Thank you.