

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

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Improving the metropolitan transportation planning process has been a major focus of federal, state, and local agencies for over 30 years. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 created a federal mandate for transportation planning in metropolitan areas throughout the country. The creation of councils of governments (COGs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) helped bring additional focus to urban transportation planning. Subsequent Acts and federal and state regulations expanded and enhanced the urban transportation planning and project selection process.

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 increased the roles and responsibilities of MPOs. The new responsibilities provide increased challenges and opportunities to MPOs throughout the country. Meeting these challenges is an ongoing concern of federal, state, and local agencies.

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) has provided a continuing forum for the discussion of the issues associated with metropolitan transportation planning. The first TRB conference on metropolitan transportation planning was held in 1965. Conferences have been held on a regular basis since then. The most recent of these conferences, which was cosponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), was held in Williamsburg, Virginia on May 21-24, 1995.

The objectives of the *Conference on Institutional Aspects of Metropolitan Transportation Planning* were to assess the responses of MPOs to the requirements of the ISTEA, to assess the resources and capabilities of MPOs to assume the new roles and responsibilities, to examine the relationships among MPOs and state and local governments, to assess the success of new partnerships, and to identify additional technical support, studies, and research needs.

To accomplish these objectives, approximately 150 representatives from MPOs, state departments of transportation, transit agencies, FHWA, FTA, consulting firms, university research organizations, and other groups

met for three days in Williamsburg. The Conference started with presentations on the status of metropolitan transportation planning activities and updates on current federal legislation. Participants then discussed the issues and opportunities associated with the metropolitan transportation planning process in workshop sessions focusing on the following topics.

Workshop 1—Roles and Responsibilities

Workshop 2—Public Participation in the Planning Process

Workshop 3—Fiscal Reality in the Planning Process

Workshop 4—Technical Linkages in the Planning Process

Workshop 5—Decision Making

Workshop 6—Integrating Related Decisions and Planning Activities

Participants in each of the workshops spent a day and a half discussing the issues and opportunities associated with their topic and possible strategies, short-term actions, and additional research to address the identified concerns. The results from the six workshops were presented and discussed at the final session of the Conference.

The major issues and opportunities, strategies, immediate actions, and research needs identified by each of the six workshop groups are presented in these proceedings. The general consensus among Conference participants was that the ISTEA has provided numerous opportunities to enhance the metropolitan transportation planning process. Although areas of concern were noted, along with items that needed further research and possible changes, the overall sentiment of the groups supported the basic concepts of the ISTEA.

These proceedings document the keynote speeches, the general session presentations, and workshop summaries. The issues, strategies, and immediate actions and research needs identified by each workshop are presented. These results should be of benefit to FHWA, FTA, TRB, MPOs, states and other groups interested in enhancing the metropolitan transportation planning process.