

## PRESENTATIONS OF KEY STUDIES ON THE INTERMODAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY ACT

Brigid Hynes-Cherin, San Francisco County Transportation Authority, and Leslie White, Clark County Public Transportation Benefit Authority—Presiding

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### Procedures MPOs Use to Consider the 15 Factors in Developing Plans and Programs Under the ISTEA

*Thomas F. Humphrey, Massachusetts Institute of  
Technology*

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Good morning. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to present the results of a recently completed research project. I will begin by describing the background and purpose of the study. This will be followed by a summary of the experiences from a limited sample of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and some of my own observations. Finally, as a good university researcher, I will conclude with some recommendations for additional research.

In the fall of 1993, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) established a panel to formulate and direct the preparation of a Synthesis on the topic *Procedures MPOs Use to Consider the 15 Factors in Developing Plans and Programs Under the ISTEA*. I was asked to develop the Synthesis on this project, *Consideration of the 15 ISTEA Factors in the Metropolitan Planning Process*, which will be available soon.

The objective of the Synthesis was to provide a snapshot of the activities underway in selected metropolitan areas throughout the country. In the summer and fall of 1994, MPOs were in the process of meeting the requirements of the ISTEA and the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. As you know, it is essential that the MPOs meet the requirements of these Acts in order to avoid possible

financial penalties and other potential sanctions. In 1994, it appeared that many MPOs were using previous studies and existing analytical tools, as well as existing institutional and organization arrangements, to meet these requirements.

Working with the TRB Synthesis panel, sixteen MPOs were identified for possible inclusion in the study. The intent of this element of the Synthesis was to obtain information from a representative, although not a scientifically selected, sample of MPOs. All of the sixteen MPOs were contacted by telephone and by mail. A standard interview guide was used to obtain the desired information. In the final analysis, we were able to obtain specific data and information from only eight of the sixteen MPOs.

In-depth information was obtained from the four MPOs. These were the MPOs in Albany, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In four other areas, more limited information on the responses to the 15 ISTEA factors was obtained from the MPOs. These four areas were Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; Portland, Oregon; and San Francisco/Oakland, California.

It is important to understand why the sample was so limited. Since the passage of ISTEA and the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, MPOs throughout the country have been subjected to intense study and surveys by numerous organizations. Some of the key MPO personnel contacted for the Synthesis indicated that they had been studied to death. In jest, but with some truth, they asked simply to be left alone to do their work. As a result, the Synthesis panel decided to limit this initial work to the eight MPOs mentioned. Further, it was decided not to use a survey questionnaire for this study. Rather, given the very limited time and resources available for the project, individual interviews were conducted by telephone and in person, and available written documentation was obtained and utilized.

Other, more in-depth studies were also underway at this time. Some of these will be described during this conference. The Synthesis was designed to be compatible with these efforts and not to duplicate other studies.

It is safe to assume that by this time all MPOs have responded to the request by FHWA and FTA to address the 15 factors included in the ISTEA. The Synthesis includes the exact responses provided to FHWA and FTA

by the eight MPOs included as case studies. I will highlight a few observations based upon the analysis of an extensive set of materials and information that go beyond that obtained solely from the eight case studies. The analysis of the personal interviews and reviews of available literature from a number of sources provide much information that is both interesting and instructive at this stage in the development of the new ISTEA planning process.

My comments will focus on the five general categories of process issues, institutional and organizational issues, technical issues, summary of concerns at this stage, and the difference made by the ISTEA. An overall observation, at the time of the completion of the research for this project in the fall of 1994, it appears that most MPOs were addressing the 15 factors in different ways. Most of the approaches utilized focused on qualitative information. More advanced quantitative and comprehensive studies were still under development in most areas.

I would like to briefly summarize a few observations on the approaches being utilized by MPOs on each of the five general categories. More detailed information is provided in the paper prepared for this conference and in the Synthesis. It is important to keep in mind that these comments represent the perspective from the staff in a limited number of MPOs. Further, they do not represent the results of a scientific sample, and they reflect conditions in the summer and early fall of 1994. Because this topic is so dynamic in nature, the shelf life of these observations may be limited.

#### **Process Issues**

- The federal requirements for submitting plans and programs are being met in most metropolitan areas. The few exceptions to this are areas where unusual circumstances may have existed and where FHWA and FTA have agreed to time extensions.

- Many MPOs are still in the process of marshaling the resources needed to deal with the ISTEA and the Clean Air Act Amendments. Most agencies have had to re-focus their efforts to meet the deadlines that have been established by these two Acts.

- In many cases, expectations have been raised beyond reasonable levels of what can realistically be accomplished at this time, concerning how the ISTEA would affect the planning process and funding re-distribution.

- There appears to be more concern with meeting the requirements related to the 15 factors MPOs must address

in the planning process, and the 23 statewide factors, than in meeting the spirit of the ISTEA legislation. This may be caused by the deadlines imposed for addressing the requirements and the potential impacts of loss of funding and other sanctions if they are not met.

- There appears to be continued concern among transit and local officials that their expectations for increased funding will not be met due to the strong highway influence in the planning process.

- Some MPOs have expressed the concern that the schedules outlined in the two Acts are unrealistic. For example, MPOs are being asked to conduct analyses with tools that may go beyond their intended uses and these studies must fit into a local political process that often pays little or no attention to the federal planning requirements of the ISTEA.

- Although many MPOs are investing substantial efforts towards providing enhanced access to citizens to participate in the planning process, it appears that there continues to be a need to establish more extensive and inclusive citizen participation programs in many areas. The exception to this concern are areas that have traditionally and successfully engaged in these activities.

- The MPO is viewed as providing the best forum that brings together all groups to discuss and analyze options for major investment studies, as well as for project environmental analyses. Many MPOs are still struggling with how these objectives can be accomplished most effectively, however.

#### **Institutional Issues**

- To a large extent the culture of MPOs has not changed appreciably, as a result of the ISTEA. Many Councils of Government and MPOs have been in existence since the 1960s. Most MPOs created comprehensive and cooperative programs that met the spirit and the intent of earlier laws, and have been able to address many of the new requirements of the ISTEA. Some MPOs appear to be experiencing difficulties in the mid 1990s, however, adjusting to the new requirements.

- Concerns exist on the part of some MPOs that the ISTEA establishes too much federal control over the local planning process. The federal agencies have attempted to minimize such influence, but what is frequently viewed as an overwhelming amount of federal paperwork does provide a continuing concern to the MPOs.

- In the 17 metropolitan areas classified by EPA as extreme, severe, and serious air quality non-attainment areas, there is concern that more extensive political cooperation is needed to develop plans and programs that will effectively address air quality issues.

- It appears that local officials in some metropolitan areas are not involved as extensively as desired in the MPO process. Local officials must be willing to deal with difficult investment trade-offs, including the desire for systems' expansion by suburban communities versus the need for systems' preservation within center city areas.

- Because the highway project pipeline often has so many highway priorities to be addressed, it appears that many MPOs must provide significant assistance to transit agencies in identifying and providing opportunities to use the funding flexibility of the ISTEA to ensure that transit projects are adequately considered.

- One of the major problems being experienced by many MPOs is the great difficulty in coordinating and communicating with the many federal, state, and regional agencies dealing with transportation and air quality planning. For example, several MPOs are concerned that meeting the conformity requirements is viewed as an afterthought rather than an important action that must be taken in advance of establishing plans and programs.

- Some MPO staff indicated that they have to deal with three public groups, each of whom have different needs. These groups are the average citizen, special interest groups, and technical staff in other agencies and the community. MPOs must develop different methods for communicating with and obtaining input from each of these groups. Limited resources and limited authority to take action makes this process even more difficult.

- The 20 statewide planning elements required by the ISTEA contains many of the same elements as the 15 MPO planning factors. This establishes another complication for MPOs to address, because of more extensive needs for coordination with state departments of transportation.

- The requirement for developing Major Investment Studies (MIS) will provide an opportunity to establish a more rational approach for creating long-range plans and will require the cooperation of all groups in the process. Highway agencies, local elected officials, transit agencies, federal agencies, and the public must all be part of the MIS process. Given the complexity of the process, however, there is concern that staff assistance from just

one agency will not be adequate to deal with the issues.

### Technical Issues

- It appears that with the exception of some isolated cases there is relatively little comprehensive planning underway that takes a top-down approach. This is because there is still a great deal of short-term project planning that must be undertaken to deal with long-standing problems. This short-term focus often comes at the expense of long-range planning.

- The plans being developed in many areas are still dealing with the numerous projects and problems that have been in the pipeline—sometimes for a decade or more—rather than focusing on new issues and opportunities.

- The requirement to update plans every three years will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in many air quality non-attainment areas due to the time and data needed to conduct the required analyses.

- Many of the technical planning models being used were originally developed decades before the ISTEA. The requirements of the Clean Air Act Amendments have stretched the ability to apply existing models to measure transportation changes required to reduce transportation generated emissions. MPOs are aware of these concerns and a number of MPOs are spending considerable funds in efforts to update data and models.

- Some MPOs indicated concern that advocacy groups often focus on the technical modeling results as the primary method for judging the adequacy of plans and programs.

- Many federal, state, and local participants in the MPO planning process have expressed the need for developing expanded technical training programs. Both FHWA and FTA are currently developing a variety of courses to meet these needs.

- Consideration should be given to establishing different technical guidelines for smaller MPOs than those used with the larger MPOs—one size does not fit all.

- It appears that limited resources will make it difficult for many MPOs to develop, analyze, and integrate the management systems.

- Although some MPOs have had the resources to obtain good data and to analyze that data, many do not have such resources.

- As a result of the ISTEA, more serious attention is being given to freight transportation issues and to land use planning as an integral part of transportation planning.

- Some MPOs have developed effective technical procedures for incorporating project planning, corridor planning, sub-regional, and regional planning into the development of comprehensive plans and programs.

### **Summary of Concerns Expressed at This Stage**

- Some MPOs expressed concerns about the need for better coordination with state departments of transportation responsible for developing the statewide plans to meet the requirements of the ISTEA. There is a need to provide more substantive input by MPOs into the statewide decision making process.

- Concerns were raised that policy and political leaders need to be made aware of the inherent limitations of available analytical tools.

- State and local officials in many areas are concerned about the ability of MPOs to meet the conformity requirements of the Clean Air Act Amendments, and about the potential financial penalties that will be imposed if these requirements are not met.

- Concerns were expressed that the expectation of increased funding for non-highway projects, such as transit and enhancements, cannot be met under existing circumstances. A major reason is that the Congress has not fully funded the ISTEA. Appropriations for most programs have been significantly less than the original authorizations contained in the ISTEA. As a result, available funds for all programs are less than desired, and all projects suffer. More innovative and secure sources of federal, state, and local funds need to be established. If they are not, continuing battles over shrinking revenues for all transportation programs will become increasingly counter-productive.

- It appears that there are relatively few visionary plans being developed. This is because there are so many immediate concerns in many areas, especially to ensure that requirements are met and funding eligibility is maintained.

- The ISTEA has raised the expectations of citizen groups and local activists beyond reasonable levels of possible results.

- A movement to establish or earmark dedicated funds for specific activities could effectively destroy many of the innovative features of the ISTEA, including the intent of flexibility in funding transportation needs.

- Incentives and methods must be established for long range, visionary, comprehensive planning that includes land use, quality of life, and financial considerations, as well as the other innovations identified by the ISTEA.

- Serious considerations and increased resources must be given to developing more effective analytical tools that deal with today's problems and issues.

### **The Differences Made by the ISTEA**

- The requirements to develop fiscally constrained plans and programs represent one of the most positive and powerful tools in the MPO battery of requirements. If highway and transit agencies take these requirements seriously, more effective planning will be possible.

- The need to deal with the preservation of the existing highway and transit systems is a significant requirement having potentially positive impacts. This has the potential for focusing energy and resources on immediate needs rather than the typical actions to deal with old problems and projects currently in the programming process.

- More effective methods for the consideration of citizen input are emerging in many areas. Citizen input must be integrated with political realities, however.

- In the past, many MPO activities have been dominated by state and federal funding availability. Many MPOs are now experiencing more cooperative input from those agencies because of the more specific requirements for MPO approval of plans and programs and the more active participation by MPO staffs in state planning activities.

- The MIS requirements provide the motivation for all participants to establish a new and innovative planning process that could eventually meet many of the expectations created by the ISTEA.

- The ISTEA and the Clean Air Act Amendments require that more serious attention be given to the urban transportation planning process in all metropolitan areas throughout the nation. In particular, the requirements and deadlines imposed by both Acts have resulted in a renewed and reinvigorated planning process in all areas.

The Synthesis is one of a series of recent research projects focusing on developing a better understanding of the manner in which MPOs are meeting the requirements for metropolitan planning as defined by the ISTEA. It provides one perspective—from the vantage point of a limited unscientifically selected number of MPO staff members—on how these requirements are being met.

In spite of the limited number of observations contained in the Synthesis, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, the two Acts have required that renewed and serious attention be given to the urban transportation planning process in all metropolitan areas throughout the nation. All of the MPOs contacted during this study are doing everything possible to meet those requirements.

Second, a concerted effort is underway at the MPO level to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the ISTEA to develop more effective multimodal metropolitan transportation plans and programs in full cooperation with other public agencies, the private sector, and the public. These efforts are enhancing the previous processes used in many areas.

Third, the ISTEA has placed more emphasis on planning elements that due to limited resources have often been given a lower priority in the past. These elements include freight planning, land use planning, and intermodal considerations.

Fourth, the requirements to develop fiscally constrained plans and programs represent one of the most powerful tools in the MPO battery. The use of this approach by highway and transit agencies will result in more effective planning and project programming.

Fifth, the need to deal with the preservation of existing highway and transit systems has the potential for focusing energy and resources on immediate needs rather than on actions to deal predominantly with old problems and adding new projects to the selection process.

Sixth, whereas in the past many MPO activities have been dominated by simply meeting the planning requirements established for state and federal programs, now many MPOs are experiencing more extensive input by state, regional, and local agencies. This is due to more specific requirements for MPO approval of plans and programs, and the more active participation by MPO staffs in those activities.

Seventh, the MIS requirements provide the motivation for all participants to establish new and innovative planning processes that could eventually help to meet many of the expectations created by the ISTEA.

The results of the MPO interviews also identified a number of concerns. For example, many MPOs noted that the ISTEA has raised the expectations of citizen groups and local officials beyond reasonable levels, at least within the short term. In addition, some MPOs have

expressed concerns about the need for more extensive coordination with state departments of transportation responsible for developing statewide plans. One goal of many MPOs is to provide more substantive input to the statewide decision making process.

Another concern raised by many MPOs related to the need to improve technical models and tools. Policy and political leaders should be made aware of the limitations of existing models and adequate resources should be programmed to develop more effective analytical tools that deal with today's problems and issues. Finally, many MPO staff members noted the need for technical assistance from state and federal sources to enable them to meet their objectives more effectively.

The significance of this Synthesis is that it summarizes some of the early struggles and successes experienced by several MPOs in meeting the new federal requirements imposed by the ISTEA. Its contribution is to document some of those evolving experiences provided by thoughtful MPO staff members in transforming the urban transportation planning process to meet the new challenges of the 21st century. Since the completion of this study, significant progress has no doubt been made on many of the issues raised in the interviews. The interview results also highlight several recommendations that might be considered to help advance the work of MPOs throughout the nation.

First, there is great value in providing opportunities for MPO directors and staff members to meet regularly to discuss issues, successes, failures, and innovations that have helped to advance the state-of-the-practice. This form of technology transfer could reap benefits relatively quickly. In addition, there is a need for a series of ongoing technical assistance programs to provide the help needed by MPOs to deal with the issues addressed and identified in the Synthesis. The FHWA and FTA are probably in the best position to develop and initiate this help.

Further, more extensive research is needed to improve existing data and analytical procedures. It may also be appropriate to develop a continuing series of issue papers dealing with technical, process, and institutional case studies. These would be very helpful to MPO staff members and would provide for a continuous dialogue among all the groups involved in the metropolitan planning process. In addition, the private sector transportation participants, including shippers and carriers, as well as other non-traditional participants such as port authorities, need to be included more extensively in the planning process.

A number of recommendations for longer-range research also emerged from the Synthesis. These include the need for a comprehensive analysis of transportation

finance innovations for multimodal planning and programming, examining methods for effective transportation system performance monitoring, and assessing the land use and transportation interface. Examining the institutional constraints that inhibit multimodal planning and programming, and assessing the role of freight transportation as an integral part of multimodal planning should also be considered. Finally, the need to develop new analytical tools for planning and programming and to develop new data collection methods and data items should be explored.

These topics may be included in research projects and programs currently being funded by federal, state, and local agencies, and other groups. A more concerted effort should be considered in addressing the comprehensive requirements that have been motivated by the ISTEA and the Clean Air Act Amendments, however.

### **States' Adaptation to the ISTEA Requirements**

*Ann Mladinov, National Academy of Public Administration and Thomas Larson, Consultant*



I am very happy to have the opportunity to present the results of the NCHRP project on *State Departments of Transportations' Strategy for Change* with Tom Larson. We were very lucky with the timing of this Conference, in that the report on this project was just published this week.

I would like to start by providing a brief description of the work conducted for the project. Tom will then summarize one of the case studies—The Bay Area Partnership in San Francisco.

The title of this conference, "Institutional Aspects of Metropolitan Transportation Planning" reflects a key focus of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). The Academy is concerned with issues associated with institutions, processes, and the

performance capacity of institutions—not policy or all the technical aspects of issues.

The Academy is set up like the National Academy of Sciences, with Fellows located throughout the country who can be brought together to address institutional and management issues and opportunities. There are several reasons why the topic for the conference is of particular interest to NAPA. First, the Academy has also identified the region as a key level for understanding and addressing domestic challenges. In addition, many of my colleagues at the Academy view the ISTEA as an important example and really a test case for other major programs. Unlike a lot of other areas, the transportation area has established institutions and processes for working across levels of government, including MPOs. Now ISTEA gives responsibilities to MPOs in transportation planning and project selection. Similar types of agencies and responsibilities do not exist to deal with housing, welfare, and other needs.

One of the key changes that state departments of transportation have had to deal with as a result of the ISTEA relate to the increased responsibilities given to MPOs. Our study was undertaken to help identify the changes in the roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved in transportation, including the metropolitan transportation planning process and the strategies state departments of transportation could use to better respond to these new roles.

To accomplish this objective, interviews were conducted with key representatives in 13 states. Representatives from the state departments of transportation, MPOs, transit agencies, other federal, state, and local agencies, citizens groups, special interest groups, and private sector groups were interviewed in each state. The interview questionnaire was also sent to other individuals throughout the country. A total of 420 completed questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

The interview questionnaire focused on the key issues forcing changes for state DOTs. For example, the first question in the interviews addressed the key factors driving change. You will probably not be surprised at the response to this question. The factors identified most often were finances, the ISTEA, and environmental concerns.

Information was also obtained on the impacts of these changes on the state departments of transportation, how states and other agencies were dealing with these changes, and the strengths and weaknesses of the DOTs in dealing with these challenges. The responses to these questions were often very similar. For example, many respondents identified the people of the DOTs as their main strength but also identified people as the major impediment to the DOTs' ability to respond effectively to forces driving