

PLENARY SESSION—Panel Discussion: Decision-making Process of MIS

Informing and Involving Decision-makers

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We are involved in the MIS process in the Bayshore Corridor, which runs out to the airport in the south part of the county, where there is economic development potential. It is a low-income corridor. Transportation improvements offer an opportunity to revitalize the neighborhood without pushing out the residents who already live there.

We have finished the MIS process based on work we did before the MIS rules came out. Most of the money for the Bayshore corridor project will come from our half-cent sales tax, and that is how it is shown in the regional transportation plan. We want to make sure we will be eligible for any Federal money that becomes available, so we are going through a Federal environmental impact document. The MIS process will make sure we have done everything that is needed.

How do we inform and involve decision-makers? The problem is that the term "decision-makers" has never been defined. Sometimes "decision-maker" sounds like it's the citizen, sometimes it sounds like it's

the business community, sometimes it sounds like it is other interest groups, sometimes it sounds like it is the resource group because they give you that 401 permit, or sometimes it sounds like it is the elected officials whom we tend to traditionally think of as the decision-makers. You have to have each one of those groups involved in the decision-making process. It also gets down to what kind of decision is being made. Is it being made by a resource agency? Is it being made by the MPO to put something into the long-range plan?

We have to give the process more time, especially since our MIS is taking three years in some areas. We are only just getting through it now. We have not had time to see whether it will be implemented. If not, why not? What have been the problems? How do you hold a

consensus together? We need time to make these new processes work.

Does the process take away flexibility? I don't think you can give a yes-or-no answer, but intuitively the answer is "no." There's nothing inherent in the process that would take away flexibility. What you're doing is putting information on the table. That information isn't always wanted, but you need to have it if you're going to have a reasonable decision-making process that takes into account the needs and interests of a variety of groups. Often, participants bring their own concerns to the table, which sometimes cuts down on flexibility. We all know that often alternatives get cut out of the process right up front because someone says they are never going to work. We have to keep an open mind and make sure we are willing to put all the facts and information on the table.

Is the new required interagency collaboration working? Is it improving decisions? These are really the same question. If it's not improving the decisions, then it's not working. As a side remark, I hope this means that we have rehabilitated the word "collaborator," because

otherwise we are doomed to failure if we call this a collaborative process.

We have had staff-to-staff coordination. People are talking in a way that they have never been talking

before. Issues are being put on the table. However, we don't have the information-sharing going on at the elected-official level that we were assuming there was. That is true for interest groups as well. It is very hard to stand up and say, this person represents the elected community, this person represents the private-interest group, this person represents business. There is no one opinion that's out there, no one person who represents all of the group's opinion. The challenge is to make sure all the right people are at the table at the right time. Sometimes they do not want the information you are giving them, but you have to make sure it is there.

Can citizens influence the outcome of MIS? If they haven't changed the decisions and haven't influenced the outcome, then we are certainly not going to

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continue to have them come to the table. One of the main values in our involvement with the citizen group in the Bayshore Corridor was that they brought to the table an alternative we hadn't considered. The community was saying, "We do not want large platform structures out in the community. They are very disruptive and create some safety hazards. We would rather use low-floor platforms." The issue there became whether we could fit both a low-floor and a high-floor technology into our existing MUNY tunnel. We are still looking at that issue. There is a great deal of potential in what the citizens put on the table.

What can be done to facilitate access for citizens to the process? We have developed a travel analysis database, which takes all the data we have on level of service, land use by parcel, bus ridership, and bus routes and puts the information on a computer using GIS. We want to take computers out to the community, where the public can sit down and do analysis of its own. People can see and understand what happens if you put your station here, how much walk-on you can get in one place versus another. This tool doesn't give you an inherent answer but does have the ability to visualize what is happening and what it means for the community.

You have to have people involved, and you have to know what the decision-making process entails. That dynamic needs to be understood. Another dynamic is that if you're seeking Federal funds, there's a Federal agency involved in that decision. If you're going for a permit, there's a Federal agency involved. That needs to be explained to elected officials as well, so there's a good understanding by everyone of how the decision gets made and what it means once it is made.

Developing 20/20 Vision for the Year 2020

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The 1991 Federal ISTEA created new rules and regulations for Transportation Planners and Providers that have significantly increased the responsibility for decision-makers in their consideration of where and how to commit resources for transportation investments.

As transportation planning and design professionals, most of us are beginning to look at the year "2020" as our planning horizon year, and everyone in this room involved in this activity is expecting to exercise 20/20

vision in developing the most cost-effective decision-maker consensus and environmentally acceptable Transportation Plan for the year 2020.

The major investment process provides transportation planners with the opportunity to perform micro-transportation planning for corridors in a systematic manner and allows decision-makers of Federal, State, and local governments as well as the general public and stakeholders of many organizations a second chance for "20/20" vision if the target was missed in a specific corridor during the Transportation Plan process for horizon year 2020. Mr. Lamers from our Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Planning Organization has given you an overview of the D-FW MPO process; therefore, I will not dwell on the details of the process but will attempt to furnish you with a review of concerns many of us as transportation planners and project implementors have as we begin to develop and, in some cases, come to closure on numerous major investment studies in the D-FW Metroplex. I believe these concerns are common to many other major urbanized areas of over 200,000 population in non-attainment areas.

The D-FW Mobility 2010 Plan is scheduled for update completion by the MPO by Fall 1996. (See Figure 1.) Some major investment studies scheduled for various corridors will be completed; however, many will *not* be. Therefore, the 2020 plan produced for consideration of the decision-makers of the area, including the governing body of the MPO, will primarily be based on macro-planning analysis, with the micro-analysis completed on a few corridors and several still in progress.

Other than for the environmental issue associated with air quality conformity (D-FW is currently in moderate non-attainment status), the macro-planning process will not be able to totally address environmental issues associated with corridors that have incomplete MIS studies. This does not mean that a flaw exists in our methodology, but an issue needs to be recognized by decision-makers as part of our revised transportation planning process. Our MPO in the D-FW transportation planning process has recognized this issue in its process for many years prior to the MIS requirement and accomplished the micro-planning by performing sub-area studies and utilizing work performed by the transportation providers under feasibility studies and the NEPA procedure; i.e., environmental assessments and environmental impact statements.

A summation of my comments about this process would be to draw an analogy to firing a new rifle on a range. The sights would need to be adjusted for variation in the