

CONDUCT OF POLICY STUDIES

About 2 years ago, the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee decided that the extensive expertise and capability present throughout TRB's committees, staff, and other activities should make a greater contribution to current policy questions. By engaging in activities that may yield recommendations for public policy, TRB could enhance the opportunity to bring the expertise of its volunteers to bear on important national questions. However, the Board also could risk tarnishing its longstanding credibility of more than 60 years—a history dedicated primarily to acting as an objective source of facts on which others may base policy through technical advancement, open exchange of ideas, and technology transfer.

Aware of this potential risk, the TRB Executive Committee took several steps in 1983 to ensure the best of both worlds: the continued credibility of TRB conferences and publications and the application of TRB's expertise to questions of national policy. The results of these steps have been apparent to the readers of *TRNews*. The Strategic Transportation Research Study recommended setting aside 0.25 percent of all apportioned federal highway funds to support a concerted national research program focused on six high-priority topics (*TRNews* July-August 1984). Another recent TRB study recommended that the 55-mph national maximum speed limit be retained on most of the nation's highways, and recommended some changes in how the federal government monitors state compliance with this law (*TRNews* November-December 1983). A study on future transportation professional needs has recently been completed by TRB (see page 25). Next year, TRB will be releasing its evaluation of the safety and pavement wear of

TRB's Subcommittee on Policy Review:

A Newcomer With a Busy Schedule



The TRB Subcommittee on Policy Review met in Washington, D.C., in April 1985 to discuss areas in which TRB should concentrate future policy research. *Left to right:* Lowell B. Jackson, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation; Clyde Woodle, Chief Engineer, U.S. House Committee on Public Works and Transportation; Lester A. Hoel, Chairman, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Virginia; Darrell V. Manning, subcommittee chairman, Adjutant General of the Idaho National Guard; Damian J. Kulash, staff representative, Assistant Director for Special Projects, TRB; and William K. Smith, Minnetonka, Minnesota.

twin-trailer trucks (*TRNews* September-October 1984). Another ongoing study will recommend how the federal government should set and apply standards for geometric aspects of resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation work on non-Interstate highways (*TRNews* March-April 1984). These familiar products are being developed under procedures that are probably new to most TRB affiliates.

TRB SUBCOMMITTEE ON POLICY REVIEW

To ensure objective, high-quality, and useful policy activities, the Executive Committee took two key steps when it decided to pursue such activities.

First, the Executive Committee deeply immersed itself in potential policy studies: approval of their scope, oversight of their progress, review of their sponsorship, and review of their reports. Second, it created the Subcommittee on Policy Review (SPR) to assist in monitoring all aspects of policy studies, and to act on behalf of the Executive Committee when timely response is required.

When the Subcommittee on Policy Review was created, the Division B Council, which had formerly been responsible for oversight of TRB's special project activities, was disbanded. The Subcommittee on Policy Review assumed the functions that had formerly been performed by the Division B Council. In addition, the Subcommittee on Policy Review was assigned the task of preparing and recommending lists of critical issues for consideration by the TRB Executive Committee.

Since its inception in 1984, the Subcommittee on Policy Review has held day-long meetings twice each year. The meetings are usually scheduled about halfway between Executive Committee meetings, so that policy activities can be monitored on a quarterly basis (twice per year by the Subcommittee on Policy Review and twice per year by the Executive Committee). Darrell V Manning, who has served as chairman of the Sub-

committee on Policy Review since it was initiated, has generally organized the SPR meetings to deal with specific themes.

For example, one meeting was devoted to the two-part National Research Council review process for reviewing TRB reports. As one part of this process, the TRB Executive Committee appoints several of its members to review each policy report. In the second part, TRB must follow strict National Research Council review procedures for its policy reports. Under these procedures, the National Research Council appoints several outside reviewers—reviewers who are not TRB members and have not been members of the study committee or otherwise involved in it. To expedite the review process, the TRB and National Research Council reviews have generally been conducted concurrently. The SPR examined in great depth how this process had worked for the recent report, 55: *A Decade of Experience*. The committee found that the process had been very constructive; it helped sharpen the arguments and clarify the conclusions. Reviewers did not attempt to integrate their personal opinions; instead they helped to improve the clarity and logic of the presentation. The Subcommittee on Policy Review's discussion of the review process confirmed that this safeguard is worth the modest increase in time and effort required.

More recently, Chairman Manning asked the Subcommittee on Policy Review to recommend to the Executive Committee the areas in which TRB should concentrate its future policy research. Previously, TRB policy research has been conducted almost entirely in response to legislative mandates. As the mandated studies are completed, however, TRB may have an opportunity to steer future policy research to areas where it is most needed and can be most effective. The SPR developed a list of criteria for screening possible topics and recommended three high-priority topics:

- Effectiveness of mandatory safety-belt laws in the various states that have enacted them;

- Assessment of safety research priorities; and

- Evaluation of state periodic motor-vehicle inspection laws.

TRB is now exploring the means to get these activities under way.

In its first 2 years, the Subcommittee on Policy Review has become one of TRB's most vital committees. The committee's nine members (six from the Executive Committee, three at-large members) come from government, universities, and industry (see accompanying box). Members are appointed for 1-year terms; the chairman is appointed for 2 years. Serving on the SPR is a time-consuming task, but the nine volunteers who have made this commitment can take substantial pride in having developed, under TRB's auspices, a highly credible and effective policy analysis capability.

The members of the TRB Subcommittee on Policy Review (1985) are as follows: Darrell V Manning, *Chairman*, Adjutant General, Idaho National Guard; Jose A. Gomez-Ibanez, Professor, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; William J. Harris, Jr., Vice President for Research and Test Department, Association of American Railroads; Lester A. Hoel, *Chairman*, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Virginia; Lowell B. Jackson, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation; H. Carl Munson, Jr., Vice President for Strategic Planning, The Boeing Commercial Airplane Company; Milton Pikarsky, Distinguished Professor of Civil Engineering, City College of New York; William K. Smith, Minnetonka, Minnesota; and Clyde Woodle, Chief Engineer, U.S. House Committee on Public Works and Transportation, Washington, D.C.

Strategic planning is a relatively new concept in the public sector. It has been borrowed from the private sector and incorporated into a growing number of state and local transportation agencies. Essentially, strategic planning is a management process that helps an organiza-

tion make critical decisions about the target of its efforts and the allocation of its resources. The central thrust of the process is to develop strategic thinking and to foster strategic decision making by leaders and, in turn, by line man-

citizens; and (c) underwriting local transit systems to the tune of \$460 million each year. This restructuring has helped to turn PennDOT's essentially bankrupt programs into a dynamic set of activities that are regaining the confidence of the state legislature.

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Similarly, at the local level, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has used strategic planning even longer to reconceptualize its conglomeration of self-supporting businesses—airports, seaports, the World Trade Center, tunnels

Applying Strategic Planning in the Transportation Sector

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agers and departments responsible for turning agency goals into results.

Recently, a number of state and local transportation agencies have begun to use this new technique to good advantage. For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has used strategic planning during the past 5 years to restructure its whole operation into three basic businesses: (a) managing a \$50 billion system of capital facilities; (b) conducting 25 million transactions each year with Pennsylvania's 12 million

and bridges, interurban railway, and bus terminals—into an economic development strategy to help revitalize the New York metropolitan region.

As practiced by large corporations since the 1960s, strategic planning has emphasized:

- Preparation of overall *mission and goals statements*;
- Scanning and analysis of the *external environment* to anticipate market forces significant to future success;
- Inventory and evaluation of the organization's *internal strengths, weaknesses, and resources*;
- Formulation, evaluation, and selection of *strategies*, using available resources, to take best advantage of

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